THE RELIGION AND SPIRITUALITY OF BLACK CHURCHGOING TEENAGERS

By

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Declarations

I declare that this work has not been previously accepted for any degree and is not being concurrently submitted in application for any degree.

Signed.....*RTAdebayo*..... (candidate)

Date: 09/06/2018

Statement 1

This thesis is the result of my own investigations, except where otherwise stated.

Other sources are acknowledged giving firm references. A bibliography is appended.

Signed.....*RTAdebayo*..... (candidate)

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Statement 2

I hereby give consent for my thesis, if accepted, to be available for photocopying and for inter-library loan, and for the title and summary to be made available to outside organisations.

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Thesis Abstract

This thesis examines the religion and spirituality of black African churchgoing teenagers in England. The study is situated within the existing literature on the religion and spirituality of children and teenagers in the field of religious studies, not as a repeat of any existing study, but as a unique investigation. It is important given the limited research that exists on the subject matter, despite the enormous population of black teenagers in the United Kingdom. The study argues that a qualitative methodology is most suitable because of the nature of the enquiry. The interview method is adopted because it allows for interaction between the researcher and the participants, which is crucial to the aims of this study.

The participants of the study comprised 27 black churchgoing teenagers, ages 13 to 15, who are members of the RCCG, an African-led denomination. The results show that even though religion and spirituality influence the lives of the participants, other factors affect the extent of this influence. The factors discussed in this study include the influence of society (societal values, social media and music) and social contexts (home, school and church) on the religion and spirituality of the participants. The perceptions and the beliefs that the participants expressed on religion and spirituality were also discussed. This information forms the basis of the main research. In addition, the influence of fashion - tattoos and body piercing - was discussed, although it was not covered by the original interview questions, as it was unexpectedly brought up during the course of the interviews.

This study contributes to the ongoing debates about the religion and spirituality of teenagers from a specific cultural background, providing a balanced comparison between the existing literature on the religion and the spirituality of teenagers from a British background and teenagers with African origins who are living in Britain. It also provides a unique understanding

and knowledge for research boards in education, black majority church leaders and teachers on the way African teenagers, particularly the participants of this study, perceive religion and spirituality, thereby helping the church leaders and the teachers to support them.

Chapter One: Introduction to the Study

1.0 Background

This thesis examines religion and spirituality from the personal perspectives of black churchgoing teenagers in England, specifically first, second, or third generation immigrants from African countries, to understand better the dynamic nature of religion and spirituality in the way that African teenagers perceive and experience them. The study is situated within the religious studies field, among various studies on the religion and spirituality of adolescents. This is not new ground, as a preliminary exploration of the literature revealed that much research has been conducted on the religion and the spirituality of teenagers, both in the United States of America (USA) and in the United Kingdom (UK). This study, however, fills a gap in the literature in relation to black British teenagers.

1.1 Rationale for the study

The present study is important for several reasons. First, black majority churches (BMCs) have noticeably proliferated recently, coupled with a rising population of young people of African descent residing in Britain (Brierley, 2005; Burgess, 2011). Second, there is a lack of research on the religion and spirituality of the black residents of Britain. In spite of the numerous studies on the religion and spirituality of adults, teenagers and children in the UK, few have focused specifically on the black population. This study could be the first to address the religion and spirituality of black churchgoing teenagers from an African background in Britain, even though this group of people constitutes a significant portion of the population (Sturge, 2005).

Finally, it is significant in light of the scholarly debates surrounding the importance of religion and spirituality among teenagers in Britain (Francis, 2001; Smith & Denton, 2005). There is an assumption that only a negligible percentage of the British population, including teenagers,

attends church regularly, and this has fuelled the belief that, teenagers in the country are not religious (Ashworth & Farthing, 2009; Brierley, 2005; Perman, 1977). However, a large percentage of teenage members of many black majority churches attend on a regular basis (Sturge, 2005; Adedibu, 2013). Given these divergent views, this study seeks to examine how black teenagers, particularly those of African descent in England, relate to religion and spirituality, with an emphasis on the influence of the society and social contexts on the participants.

1.2 Research aim and questions

The present study is intended to investigate religion and spirituality of black churchgoing teenagers between the ages of 13 and 15 in Leicester, England. To this end, three research questions have been formulated. First, what is the perception of the participants about religion, spirituality, and church attendance? Second, what is the influence of the contemporary British society on the way black churchgoing teenagers engage with religion and spirituality? Finally, what influence does the participants' social contexts (home, school, church) have on their religion and spirituality?

1.3 Definition of religion and spirituality

In this thesis, religion and spirituality are defined as multi-dimensional constructs which include religious "beliefs, practices, experiences, identities, and attitudes" (Smith & Denton, 2005, p. 26). In this case, the beliefs include belief in God, the Trinity, angels, death, life after death, and the devil and his demons; while the religious practices include the attendance of church programmes, involvement in Christian spirituality-enhancing programmes such as youth camp, Boys brigade, Girls brigade, reading scriptures, and praying. The religious and spiritual experiences include being born again and filled with the Holy Spirit; and the religious

identities include the incorporation of religious values, heritage, and connection to others both within and outside the cultural and religious community. The religious attitudes aspect includes emphasising the importance of religion and spirituality or one's perceived closeness to God.

1.4 Previous research

Research (Hill *et al*., 2000; Zinnbauer *et al*., 1997; Zinnbauer & Pargament, 2013) has shown that one of the key issues in studying religion and spirituality is how the constructs are defined. A lack of specific definitions of religion and spirituality may lead to inaccurate conclusions about their influence on an individual or corporate community. A cross-disciplinary review of literature undertaken for this study shows that, although religion and spirituality were defined as distinct from one another in the past and more recent studies have conceptualised them as multidimensional constructs because of common characteristics that both share, despite certain unique features of each. For example, Marty and Appleby (1991), in explaining the distinctive features of religion, argue that it deals with people's ultimate concerns and provides personal and social identity within the context of a cosmic or metaphysical background. It also stipulates some sort of code of conduct for adherents, which involve the practice of certain forms of expression, which are not part of spiritual expression. In relation to the common characteristics shared by both concepts, spirituality encompasses a search for meaning in life, an encounter with transcendence, a sense of community, a search for ultimate truth and a personal transformation (LaPierre, 1994), all of which may also be part of religion. As multidimensional constructs, religion and spirituality are seen as relating to sacred, affective, biological, cognitive, moral, relational, social, cultural and worldwide occurrences (Zinnbauer *et al*., 1997). These constructs are elaborated further in chapter 2.

It emerges in this study that religion and spirituality play key roles in the lives of teenagers, particularly in England (Francis, 2001, 2013), despite the aforementioned assumption of a widespread decrease in the attendance of church programmes by young people (Perman, 1977). Studies have shown that this assumption does not hold for all teenagers, as church affiliation, such as Pentecostal, as well as ethnicity, such as black immigrants in England, play a key role in teenagers' religion and spirituality. For example, Burgess (2011) and Hunt (2002) claimed that young people from African backgrounds comprise the largest percentage of the congregations in the BMCs in Britain, and that they attend church programmes on a regular basis. Such young people are the focus of this study, which investigates how they relate to religion and spirituality (see chapters 4 and 5 for a detailed discussion of the context).

1.5 Theoretical framework

The theoretical framework on which this study rests is two-fold, comprising the interpretive and phenomenology approaches. Following the former, this study examines the religion and spirituality of teenagers in a particular social setting (Richard, 2015), namely, the Redeemed Christian Church of God, which is one of the denominations of the black majority churches in Britain. In line with this approach, the study is concerned with understanding a phenomenon or social process through accessing the meanings that an individual assigns to it (Schwandt, 1994). In order to achieve this, it is necessary to 'get inside the world of those generating' the phenomenon under scrutiny (Bevir & Rhodes, 2002, p. 5). This is because, as argued by Bevir and Rhodes (2002), it is not possible to glean fully people's beliefs and preferences from objective facts about them.

As a phenomenological study, this research focuses on understanding teenagers' subjective experiences and interpretations of religion and spirituality in relation to other factors that might

play on them. Research has shown that there is a complex interaction between the development of teenagers' lives and the religious and spiritual influence of family, church and the social environment (Regnerus, 2003; Smith & Denton, 2005). Thus, the religion and spirituality of black churchgoing teenagers are explored as phenomena within an interpretive phenomenological framework.

1.5 Research context

This study is carried out among black churchgoing teenagers who are members of the Redeemed Christian Church of God (RCCG) in Leicester. This is an African-led denomination amongst the Black Majority Churches (BMCs) in England. Recent research, such Burgess (2011) and Hunt (2002), has revealed that BMCs are proliferating in various parts of Britain, and Leicester is one of the locations where the RCCG denomination is concentrated, with about six active parishes. Various studies (Adedibu, 2010; Burgess, 2009; Hunt & Lightly, 2001) have shown that the RCCG is one of the most well-established, and is the fastest growing, black majority denomination in Britain, with parishes in almost every part of the United Kingdom. Research has also demonstrated that the majority of the RCCG's members are young people (Burgess, 2011; Hunt, 2002). This is attributed to the peculiarity of the doctrines of the RCCG as well as the constitution of the Nigerian population in the UK, as they constitute 99% of the church's congregation (Burgess, 2011). Burgess writes that Nigerians are one of the largest African communities in Britain, with a population of about 146,000 as of 2006, excluding children that were born in the UK to Nigerian parents and those who may be undocumented (p. 430). Ever since then, the population has been growing continuously. Although there have been a few studies on the RCCG denomination, such as Hunt and Lightly (2001), Hunt (2002), Burgess (2009, 2011) and Adedibu (2013), the majority of these were carried out in London.

To the best of my knowledge, there is yet to be any research on the RCCG in Leicester, which has six vibrant parishes despite its smaller size in comparison to London.

1.6 Research methodology

This research adopts a qualitative methodology in line with its aim, which is to investigate religion and spirituality from the perspectives of the participants (Edwards & Skinners, 2010). As Ritchie and Spencer (2002) noted, qualitative methodologies that are carried out within interpretive and phenomenological approaches are used to study human behaviours in a particular social setting, focusing on the *whys* and *hows* of the phenomenon. Richard (2015) argues that "qualitative methods are ways of studying people and their social world by going there, observing them closely, in their natural setting, and learning how they understand their situations and account for their behaviour" (p. 1). Through qualitative methodologies, the researcher attempts to understand individuals or a small number of cases, and data are collected through interviews, observations, document reviews and visual data analysis (Mackenzie & Knipe, 2006). Thus, adopting such a methodology offers the opportunity to hear the experiences of each of the participants with regard to their religion and spirituality, including their struggles and aspirations. The value of this is grounded on the argument that each individual's understanding of the world, in particular his or her religious experience is unique. This uniqueness includes the experiences of individuals within their cultural or sub-cultural context. Since this study looks at the religion and spirituality of black teenagers within the larger British culture and African sub-culture, a qualitative methodology is deemed appropriate to study the present constructs.

Although there are many methods of gathering qualitative data, the primary method of collecting data in this study is through personal interviews. The interview method "provides a

unique opportunity to uncover rich and complex information from an individual" (Cavana, Delahaye, & Sekaran, 2001, p. 139), as it provides space for interaction between the researcher and the participants. The interviews are semi-structured, and carried out face-to-face and individually. The reason for face-to-face interviews is to obtain verbal answers while observing participants' non-verbal cues, as they can be very useful during the analysis.

The initial participants in this study are 30 teenagers, between the ages of 13 and 15, chosen through purposive sampling of black churchgoing youth who are members of the RCCG in Leicester, although only 27 of them were available for the interview. Robinson (2014) defines purposive sampling strategies as "non-random ways of ensuring that particular categories of cases within a sampling universe are represented in the final sample of a project" (p. 32). This type of sampling was selected because of my familiarity with the setting of the study, which afforded me the opportunity to invite certain individuals, whom I assumed have a unique understanding of the phenomenon, to participate. The teenage participants have been attending the church on a regular basis, for example, they must have been attending church programmes at least once a week for more than one year. This level of involvement was assessed through the caretakers before the commencement of the interviews. Field notes and a diary also form part of the data collection tools. In this way, I was able to document the facial expressions and body language of each participant, which helped me match what the participants said to how it was said during the analysis. Access to the participants was obtained through caretakers, in this case, the pastors and the parents/guardians of the participants. The permission of these people was sought before the participants themselves were contacted because they are minors.

1.7 Data analysis strategy

The strategy adopted for analysing the data collected for this study is the interpretive phenomenology approach. This strategy provides the opportunity to perceive the experiences of each of the participants with regard to their religion and spirituality, including their struggles and aspirations. Lester (1999) purported that personal knowledge and subjectivity are the two basic foundations on which the Interpretive Phenomenological Approach (IPA) is grounded. In order to achieve this, I had to 'get inside the world of those generating' the phenomena under scrutiny (Bevir & Rhodes, 2002, p. 5) by allowing the voice of the individual to be heard. This approach requires that the researcher possess some important skills, such as listening, empathy, rapport building, and knowing how and when to speak. As a researcher, I possess many of these skills already but I am still developing them; thus, it may be that a seasoned researcher could elicit more substantive data within a short time than I did. Nonetheless, I understand that it is important to establish a good level of rapport and empathy with the participants in order to obtain complex information concerning their religion and spirituality, which is the focus of this research (Measor, 1985).

The process of data collection involved the audio recording of personal, one-to-one interviews conducted among 27 black teenagers, between the ages of 13 and 15, in Leicester. The interviews were manually transcribed verbatim into a written format. During this stage, I immersed myself in the careful reading and re-reading of the transcripts. This was followed by the process of coding, which involved organising the data into themes. Grbich (2009) defines thematic coding as "a process of segmentation, categorisation and re-linking of aspects of the data prior to final interpretation" (p. 19). Details of how the research is conducted can be found in the methodology section in chapter 6.

1.8 Thesis outline

Chapter 1 of this thesis outlines the importance of this study as an area of scholarly inquiry as well as for educators. It presents a brief introduction to the context of religion and spirituality as they are defined here and the approaches employed to study these constructs. The definitions and approaches to studying religion and spirituality are elaborated in chapters 2 and 3. Chapter 1 also highlights potential gaps within the literature on religion and spirituality, which the present study aims to bridge. It introduces the interpretive phenomenological approach as the conceptual framework on which the study is built. It also explains that individual personal interviews, within a qualitative methodology, are the principal method of gathering data because of the nature of the present inquiry, which requires personal interaction with the participants (this is elaborated in chapter 6). The chapter also includes an overview of the thesis.

The subsequent chapters build on the introductory chapter. Chapter 2 gives an overview of the literature, identifying the conceptual constructs of religion and spirituality, beginning with a discussion of the definitions of these terms. The conceptual understanding of both concepts from different academic disciplines is explored in order to provide a platform for this research. The chapter then compares the two concepts of religion and spirituality, and subsequently describes 'teenage' as a construct. It also presents the conceptual constructs of the religion and the spirituality of teenagers in relation to how some teenagers in England still practise their religion.

Chapter 3 explores the approaches previous researchers have taken to studying the religion and the spirituality of teenagers. The chapter presents two important articles, one of which employed a quantitative approach, while the other's approach was qualitative, and the results each generated. The chapter also highlights some of the influences that religion and spirituality

have on teenagers. Chapter 4 discusses the literature on the establishment and growth of black majority churches in Britain as an important aspect of this study because of its relationship to the context. The chapter begins by exploring the development of the terminology, explaining how 'black majority' came to be adopted as an umbrella name for churches consisting mainly of black people, which either are led or have been established by black people. It also explores some of the factors contributing to the growth of such churches in Britain.

Chapter 5 examines the establishment of the RCCG in Britain, the context from which the participants of this present study were selected. It also highlights the growth of this church, particularly in relation to the role of young people and the denomination's doctrine. Chapter 6 presents the research methodology and strategy for analysis, starting with the philosophy of interpretive phenomenology, and explains how it supports the aim of the thesis. It then provides a detailed description of the processes of data collection, including the selection of participants and research instruments. This chapter also presents the researcher's positionality and the ethical issues involved.

The presentation and discussion of the new empirical findings in this thesis begin in chapter 7. In this chapter, a detailed report of the study's findings on the personal perception of religion and spirituality, in terms of meanings assigned to these constructs by the participants, is presented. These findings are discussed in relation to the extant literature on the subject matter. Chapter 8 presents the findings on the perception of church attendance among the participants. This includes details of the reasons why the participants still attend church, despite a general decrease in church attendance among teenagers. Chapter 9 explores the beliefs about religion and spirituality that the participants hold. In this chapter, a detailed account is given on some of their specific beliefs. These include the beliefs about God, death, life after death, including

how the beliefs about life after death influence church attendance among the participants. Chapter 10 presents a detailed discussion of the religious and spiritual experiences of the teenage participants in relation to the existing literature. This experience is explored in relation to the three aspects of conversion, personal engagement with prayers and Bible study, and communal involvement in worship and church related activities. Chapter 11 documents the empirical findings on the influence of the society on the religion and spirituality of the participants. This includes the influence of societal values, social media, music and fashion. Chapter 12 presents the influence that social contexts have on the religion and spirituality of the participants. In this chapter, the influence of home, school, peers and church are examined in connection with extant literature.

The final chapter of this thesis, chapter 13, concludes the thesis. This chapter argues that the importance of religion and spirituality among black churchgoing teenagers is a new area of research, which requires further development. It covers the research limitations alongside the conclusions. It also recommends further investigation of the religion and spirituality of teenagers from a black African background to build on the findings presented here. The chapter thus presents suggestions for future inquiry.

Chapter Two: Conceptualising the Religion and Spirituality of Teenagers

2.0 Chapter introduction

Religion and spirituality have been part of the human experience since time immemorial, and their presence is manifested in many human activities, such as music, arts and crafts, poetry, devotion, warfare, inspiration, aspiration, morality, devotion, sacrifice, and conflict (Zinnbauer & Pargament, 2013). Consequently, religion and spirituality attracted a great deal of scholarly interest, initially in the social sciences, but also among researchers from other fields, such as the social work and health sectors. One of the challenges of studying religion and spirituality has been inconsistency in the definitions of these terms, as scholars have defined them as they relate to their own area of study. Nevertheless, most of the definitions proffered have relied on some combination of the elements of beliefs, behaviours, feelings, attributes, relationships and experiences (Zinnbauer & Pargament, 2013).

The lack of standardised definitions continues to be problematic for anyone studying religion and spirituality, as consensual definitions would give the terms a more acceptable footing among scholars by establishing boundaries. This chapter looks at the main issues related to the religion and spirituality of teenagers, starting with the problem of defining the terms before examining the relationship between religion and spirituality and the meaning of teenage. Secondly, the chapter explores the problematic construction of teenage religion and spirituality in contemporary society.

2.1 Defining religion

Traditionally, religion has been defined from two basic perspectives, the substantive, in terms of the sacred substance, and the functional, in terms of the place of religion in the social and psychological system (Berger, 1994). While psychology and theology scholars emphasise the

individual's beliefs, emotions, behaviour and motivation, i.e. substantive aspects (Pargament, 1999), sociologists emphasise the social or communal aspects of religion in their conceptualisation. Researchers who define religion from a substantive perspective investigate the emotions, behaviours, thoughts, relationships and other features that relate to sacred qualities or that have to do with transcendent power (Pargament & Mahoney, 2002). For example, James (1961), as cited in Paloutzian and Park (2014), described religion from a psychological view, claiming that it is "the feelings, acts, and experiences of individual men in their solitude, so far as they apprehend themselves to stand in relation to whatever they may consider the divine" (p. 42). Tylor (1871), however, as cited in Chryssides and Geaves (2007), defined religion as "belief in supernatural beings" (Chryssides & Geaves, 2007, p. 19). Thus, it encompasses a connection with something or someone that lies beyond the physical world, which can be termed a "supernatural being," as argued by Chryssides and Geaves (2007).

Hence, this definition of religion could be described as "substantive" or "supernaturalism," as it defines religion in relation to a supernatural realm (Chryssides & Geaves, 2007, p. 19). Tylor's definition of religion distinguishes between three varieties of religious tradition, namely: animism, which is the belief that natural objects, such as trees and rivers, have spirits and are alive; polytheism, which refers to belief in a plurality of gods; and monotheism, the belief in a single God. Furthermore, Otto (1928) described religion as "the experience of the numinous," arguing that the good way to define it is as an experience of divinity, i.e. something or someone that cannot be described. Hence, to Otto, religion is not just belief but experience as well; it is something that one has to come into contact with personally. Similarly, Tillich (1965) argued that it is "the state of being grasped by an ultimate concern" (p. 4). Meanwhile, Argyle and Beit-Hallahmi (1975) defined religion as a "system of beliefs in a divine or superhuman power, and practices of worship or other rituals directed towards such power" (p.

1). This definition supports Chryssides and Geaves's (2007) argument that religion is more than simply a belief in God, like "just an extra piece of information to be stored in the memory, but it is something that is 'compelling, and makes demands of believers'" (p. 29). That is, it is something to be grasped, related to, and made sense of.

However, the substantive definition of religion has been criticised for not providing a full description of the meaning of religion adequately to all people, as it deals only with the experiential aspect. It is argued that experience is just one aspect of religion amongst several others, and that there are many religious people, who do not experience religion in the way envisioned in Otto's definition of the term. For example, Chryssides and Geaves (2007) argue that the substantive definition of religion does not apply to Buddhism, because in Buddhism, there is no belief in a creator God, making it is more of a philosophy. Tillich's definition of religion is also criticised as being only applicable to serious practitioners, such as monks and martyrs, but not to laypeople, in whose lives religion might occupy only a small part. Tillich's critics argue that it is possible for people to be religious yet have other things that occupy the place of "ultimate concern" in their lives, such as their football club or going on holiday. In some cases, these could even be recognised as such a person's religion (Hunt, 2002).

Functional definitions of religion examine its impacts on individuals and society at large. These include how beliefs, behaviours, emotions, experiences and practices, as mechanisms of religion, help followers deal with major existential issues, such as meaning, death, suffering, isolation, and injustice (Paloutzian & Park, 2014). Hence, Batson, Schoenrade, and Ventis (1993) defined religion functionally as "Whatever we as individuals do to come to grips personally with the questions that confront us because we are aware that we and others like us are alive and that we will die" (p. 9). Generally, functional definitions of religion emphasise

the roles or actions that religion plays in the life of an individual or in society. However, defining religion functionally alone has been criticised as oversimplification because it limits religion to activities, with no regard for the sacred aspect of it. Chryssides and Geaves (2007) argue that Christian religious beliefs, for example, are not just "assortments of unrelated points, but hang together in a coherent way" (p. 25), specifically on God's creation: how this creation was marred by sin, and how God sought to redeem the world through the incarnation of Jesus Christ.

Nevertheless, it has been argued that practice is an integral part of functional religion, because it is through this that one seeks answers to the issues of life, such as meaning: Why was I born? What happens when I die? And why is there suffering and death in the world? Chryssides and Geaves (2007) maintain that these questions cannot be answered by intellectual speculation, despite the efforts of philosophers to do so. The ethical codes in religion offer guidance for life, while the practices of religion offer strength for living and consolation in sorrow.

Many recent researchers have argued for a balanced definition of religion, which incorporates both the substantive and functional aspects. For instance, Smith and Denton (2005) and Francis and Robbins (2007) affirm that any complete definition of religion should incorporate its dimensional constructs, such as beliefs, public participation, and private behaviour, in order to measure every aspect. Pargament (1999) defines religion as "a search for significance in ways related to the sacred" (p. 11). This definition bridges the gap between the substantive and functional aspects of religion, as it includes both the sacred and functional elements. Pargament (1999) declares that significance, in this sense, means whatever people value in life, whether psychological, social, physical or spiritual, because different people seek different objects of significance. He also recognises that not everything that is significant can be classified as

religious, because a religious search is one that relates to the sacred; and this search, like many other quests, is made up of two dimensions, namely, a "pathway" and a "destination" (p. 12). Pargament maintains that the sacred can be part of both or one of these dimensions as well as attendance at religious institutions, holding religious beliefs, and involvement in prayer and rituals as comprising part of the sacred pathway. The ultimate, or God, is then the sacred destination.

Pargament acknowledges, however, that it is possible for people to be involved in the search for a religious pathway, which may not lead to a sacred destination because many people get involved in religion for reasons, which do not involve a sacred destination. Chryssides and Geaves (2007) argue that religion encourages prayer, meditation, worship, ceremonies, and "rites of passage" (p. 25). It also offers hope and sustenance to followers, as it encourages them to work for a better world, or a higher goal in the world to come, revealing that nothing that happens in this life, including evil, suffering and death, are without a purpose.

For the purposes of this study, religion is defined as a multidimensional construct comprising a structured system of beliefs, practices and ritual, which incorporates public and private behaviours, attitudes and beliefs. Having provided an overview of the scholarly definitions of religion, the next section of this chapter presents the prominent definitions of spirituality.

2.2 Defining spirituality

Although no clear distinction was made between religion and spirituality in past definitions, the latter has recently emerged as a separate construct, making it essential to define it separately. Since spirituality has come to occupy a place outside the framework of religion, there has been tension in the ways the terms are defined relative to each other. It is argued that

spirituality has become more popular in cultures that promote individualism and at a time when traditional authority and cultural norms are mostly rejected (Berger, 1967; Hood, 2003). This has resulted in the proliferation of spirituality organisations and groups that are opposed to institutional religion (Zinnbauer & Pargament, 2013), giving people who have left their traditional religions in pursuit of spirituality the opportunity to join others with similar mind-sets and goals.

Wright (2000) defines spirituality as "the relationship of an individual, within a community and tradition, to that which is or is perceived to be the ultimate truth, as appropriated through an informed, sensitive and reflective striving for spiritual wisdom" (p. 104). This definition deals with the questions of the ultimate meaning, purpose, identity and nature of life. It encompasses the connection that exists between individuals within a community and culture (Who am I? Where Am I? Why am I here? What is the reason behind my action?).

Meanwhile, academics that describe spirituality within the context of religion have defined it from a subjective perspective. For instance, Pargament (1999) defines spirituality as "a search for the sacred" (p. 12), placing emphasis on the people who do the searching rather than the pathway or the destination. Spirituality is also described as the way people "think, feel, act, or interrelate in their efforts to find, conserve, and if necessary, transform the sacred in their lives" (p. 12). Other definitions of spirituality include: "the human response to God's gracious call to a relationship with himself" (Benner, 1989, p. 20); "a subjective experience of the sacred" (Vaughan, 1991, p. 105); "that vast realm of human potential dealing with ultimate purposes, with higher entities, with God, with love, with compassion, with purpose" (Tart, 1975, p. 4); and "an attraction to the things of the spirit rather than to earthly things" (Singleton, Mason, & Webber, 2004, p. 250). In all of these definitions, it is clear that spirituality transcends an

individual person; nonetheless, it connects the individual to something or someone that is greater than the self. Roehlkepartain (2004) describes spirituality as:

> The intrinsic human capacity for self-transcendence in which the individual participates in the sacred - something greater than the self. It propels the search for connectedness, meaning, purpose, and ethical responsibility. It is experienced, formed, shaped, and expressed through a wide range of religious narratives, beliefs, and practices, and is shaped by many influences in family, community, society, culture, and nature. (p. 122)

Therefore, in this thesis, spirituality is seen as a multidimensional construct within the framework of religion, which refers to the way an individual relates to God within and outside his or her community and culture through feelings, actions and behaviours.

2.3 The relationship between religion and spirituality

Religion and spirituality have been defined in a generic way for many years, particularly by psychologists (Zinnbauer *et al*., 1997; Zinnbauer, Pargament, Scott, 1999). This is because there has always been a general consensus regarding the multidimensional construct of the terms (Hill *et al*., 2000). Traditionally, psychologists have not differentiated between the two (Hill *et al*., 2000; Pargament, 1999), regarding them rather as a "broad-band" construct (Zinnbauer & Pargament 2013). Hence, they were studied under the broad term of religion or used interchangeably (Spilka & McIntosh, 1996). However, an increasing number of contemporary scholars are defining spirituality outside a religious framework. Many scholars have demarcated between religion and spirituality in relation to the contexts in which they unfold. For example, it is argued that religion is more limited than spirituality in terms of context because it is necessarily embedded within an established institution, whereas spirituality can be expressed both within and outside traditional religious organisations (Hardy, 1979; Timothy & Conover, 2006). It has been observed that individuals, who claim to be spiritual are not necessarily religious, as some of them profess to be atheists or materialists. Timothy and Conover (2006) argue that "Even non-believers or atheists can experience

something outside themselves that whispers acknowledgment of something beyond" (p. 290), but in a different way than religious people experience it; because while religious people will likely experience 'transcendence' through God, the non-religious may experience transcendence through other 'sacred' things. Durkheim (1915) expatiated on the notion of this sacredness when he wrote, "By sacred things one must not understand simply those personal beings which are called Gods or spirits; [because] a rock, a tree, a spring, a pebble, a piece of wood, a house, in a word, anything can be sacred" (p. 52).

Additionally, while religion is described in terms of established organisations and corporate worship, spirituality is characterised by its individualistic nature. For example, Heelas *et al*. (2005) define spirituality in relation to the personal quest for meaning, which can be derived from any object and phenomenon. Heelas *et al.* noted that people who claimed to be spiritual assessed themselves as being separate from other people within their immediate surroundings. It has also been claimed that it is easier for people to describe themselves as spiritual when they have no religious inclination (Van Ness, 1996) because everyone has a need for spirituality; it represents the search for meaning, purpose and connection in life (Oldnall, 1996), but not everyone has a need for religion. Furthermore, scholars have argued that religion involves rituals and piety, such as acts of devotion, prayers, sacrifice and the worship of God (Argyle & Beit-Hallahmi, 1975; Zinnbauer *et al*., 1997), whereas spirituality is said to be free of rituals. Religion is also described in terms of strict moral codes and a set of rules that believers are encouraged to follow (Rohmann, 1999), while spirituality encourages its adherents to follow natural law, ethics and moral values, which are more subjective and less objective compared to religion (Argyle & Beit-Hallahmi, 1975; Rohmann, 1999). Religious moral codes are arguably more exclusionary than moral codes in spirituality, as they are

regarded as potentially being discriminatory towards certain categories of people because of their lifestyle, and could be contentious as well (Mitroff & Denton, 1999; Hill *et al*., 2000).

Functionally, Pargament (1999) maintains that religion is directed toward the pursuit of a wider set of destinations or significant goals while spirituality focuses on the search for one particular significant destination. Pargament (1999) further acknowledges that religion facilitates spirituality and serves other functions that are psychological, social, and physical, while spirituality facilitates only the sacred. Tart (1975) described religion as "the enormous social structures that embrace so many more things than direct spiritual experience," as it is associated with "priests, dogmas, doctrines, churches, institutions, political meddling, and social organisation" (p. 4). Spirituality, on the other hand, can be described as an individual's personal experience regarding the meaning of life, how to live and one's relationship with God. In Tart's own words, spirituality refers to "that vast realm of human potential dealing with ultimate purpose, with higher entities, with God, with life, with compassion, with purpose" (p. 4).

However, describing religion in opposition to spirituality has been referred to as the polarisation of the two terms (Zinnbauer & Pargament, 2013). Pargament (1999) condemns this as unnecessary because defining religion from a substantive point of view alone reduces the construct to rigid entities, thereby negating its dynamic and functional aspects. In addition, describing institutional religion as directly in opposition to personal spirituality has been regarded as problematic because it limits religion to a social context without including the individualistic aspect of it, that is, the fundamental aspects of the construct, such as personal belief, emotion, behaviour and experience. Similarly, describing spirituality as a personal phenomenon is to ignore the cultural context in which it occurs. This is because spirituality as

a construct is not free from cultural influences, because it could not occur in a social vacuum, and it is still embedded in a cultural context (Hood, 2003).

Furthermore, many scholars are critical of polarising the two concepts, because they are both multidimensional and interrelated, encompassing similar aspects of human activity and experiences (Paloutzian & Park, 2014). Zinnbauer *et al*. (1997) declared, "It is our belief that spirituality, however it is defined and expressed in our pluralistic society, should have a home within a broadband conceptualisation of religion" (p. 563). Zinnbauer *et al*. then suggested that complete definitions of religion should be sufficiently wide to include both "the personal and the institutional, the traditional and the progressive, the helpful and the harmful" (p. 563). Hill *et al*. (2000) argue that defining religion and spirituality in opposition to each other could "close the door to future opportunities to explore the similarities and differences between the two concepts" (p. 72) because both religion and spirituality have the sacred as their core substance. As a result, it is impossible to distinguish religion and spirituality from other terminologies, such as community, meaning, authenticity, and so on, that are often used within the larger field of psychology, without acknowledging the element of the sacred. Arguably, religion is more than beliefs about God and spirituality, more than oneness with life or finding meaning. They both involve other elements that intertwine with each other. Pargament (1999) declares, "Spirituality is the heart and soul of religion" (p. 13).

Both religion and spirituality can be experienced and expressed individually and institutionally, and both can take traditional or non-traditional forms. In addition, both religion and spirituality involve processes of searching, whether the focus is on what is sought or on who is searching. Both constructs are dynamic, as they have evolved and changed over time through the processes of discovery, conservation and transformation; this has occurred on a broad societal

level as well as on the individual level as people journey through life. They are both multi-level processes and not necessarily isolated journeys, but could involve other people, such as families, couples, communities, cultures, and organisations. Hence, taking spirituality out of religion as an entirely separate phenomenon makes religion incomplete.

The similarities between religion and spirituality explain why it is difficult for many scholars to differentiate between the two in their usage. For example, Miller and Martin (1988) use religion and spirituality interchangeably, even after they have explicitly stated that spirituality "may or may not include involvement in the organised religion" (p. 14). Some social scientists have also argued that it is important to study both constructs together because of their inter-connectedness and the way that Western society is rapidly changing in its religious expectations. Spirituality cannot occur in a vacuum, because it is necessarily influenced by the religious, secular or agnostic views of adherents. As Wright (2000) declares that religion provides a channel for the expression of our spirituality and they both help people meet their need for "communication, identity, order, meaning, direction, hope, as well as a sense of wholeness and a desire for clear moral standards" (Elias, 1991, p. 459). Furthermore, both religion and spirituality can have positive and negative influences on adherents (Zinnbauer *et al*., 1997; Paloutzian & Park, 2014). For example, there are those, such as members of terrorist groups, who have killed and maimed innocent people in the name of religion and spirituality. However, how interpretations or practices of religion could encourage killing or hurting people is beyond the scope of this thesis.

Additionally, studies have shown that both religion and spirituality have cross-disciplinary characters, which are recognised by both scientists and clinicians (Belzen, 2002; Kemp, 1996). Both can be defined according to their substantive and functional aspects, as they both relate

to affective, biological, cognitive, moral, personality, relational, social, cultural and worldwide features and occurrences (Zinnbauer *et al*., 1997). Moreover, Paloutzian and Park (2014) argue that religion and spirituality are capable of developing and changing over time for individuals and groups, and their usage can evolve, depending on the perspective and experience of the writer. They can also overlap, such as in the USA and parts of Africa, where most people describe themselves as both religious and spiritual. The complexity of defining boundaries between the two is recognised by many scholars, as many studies incorporate many aspects of community life, personal commitment to the sacred thing, and attendance at a place of worship, as part of a person's religion. Zinnbauer, Pargament, and Scott (1999) argue that many social science scholars place spirituality within the framework of religion because it is sometimes difficult to explain the types of phenomenon that each term represents as a result of their inter-connectedness. Hence, spirituality as a subject is now becoming a popular topic of discussion within the religious community (Bridger, 2001; Zinnbauer *et al*., 1997). This is evident in Zinnbauer *et al*.'s (1997) assertion that "spirituality currently reflects new developments in individual and cultural religious expression, and could inject a great deal of excitement and interest into our discipline" (p. 563).

Therefore, in this thesis, religion and spirituality are defined as multi-dimensional constructs, relating to the personal relationships that individuals have with God, which is demonstrated through their beliefs, behaviours, practices, church attendance and involvement in other Christian spirituality-enhancing programmes and services, within and outside the traditional church institutions. This leads to the discussion of another important concept of this chapter, which is teenage.

2.4 The meaning of teenage

Teenage or adolescence is regarded as a very important transitional period between childhood and adulthood. It is characterised by an increase in cognitive ability, such as a greater ability to understand abstract concepts. Santrock (2005) describes teenage as between the age of about 10 and 22 years; although some scholars define it as between the ages of 13 and 19, arguing that the word is used because these ages end with 'teen'. The present study does not take a stand as to why teenage is defined the way it is, but rather focuses on the important characteristics of this stage of life. Scholars who study child development affirm that the teenage stage is characterised by development in the personal, cognitive and social life, which usually affects the behaviour of teenagers in unique ways. For example, Santrock (2005) declares that the teenage years are marked by identity formation and recognition; more interest in problem solving skills; acceptance of the rules as their own and taking responsibility for breaking rules; and increased interest in the opposite gender and peer relationships. Kingery and Erdley (2007) argue that the social or peer relations that are formed during the teenage stage create a larger social network, which can sometimes have both positive and negative impacts.

According to Western psychologists, teenage is a period of potential crisis as a result of the uncertainties that come along with its physical and social transitions (Robinson, 1999). Research has shown that contemporary teenagers in particular are growing up in a society that is filled with different choices, such as music, technology, fashion, magazines, leisure, new religions and entertainment. It is argued that many people pass through this transitional period without much hassle, while a few others have not been so lucky (Donahue & Benson, 1995). Research (Francis, 2001; Smith & Denton, 2005) has shown that religion and spirituality play a key role in the lives of the former type, who, as teenagers, are able to sail through whatever

life presents at this stage without becoming submerged. This sets the stage for the current study on the religion and spirituality of teenagers, which is laid out in the next section. In this thesis, teenage or teenager is used to describe young people between the ages of 13 and 15 because the participants all fall into this age bracket.

2.5 The religion and spirituality of teenagers

The literature on the religion and spirituality of teenagers is long-established and diverse. The earliest studies were carried out in the United States of America, while more recently, research in the United Kingdom has been conducted as a result of the way religious integration is now becoming an integral part of Britain due to its multi-cultural nature. Scholars have established that religion and spirituality are important aspects of any nation, including Britain. Nevertheless, research has shown that Britain, which was once an entirely Christian country, has lost this religious identity as a result of the decline in church attendance among young people (Perman, 1977; Day, 2010). Scholars argue that there has been a consistent decline in church attendance in Britain since 1972, as fewer and fewer people attend church services every year, and this calls for concern (Perman, 1977; Davie, 1994; Bruce, 2002; Day, 2010). Perman (1977) stressed that the decline in church attendance in Britain did not begin suddenly, but rather began slowly and has been progressing gradually since 1972. Perman argued that the reasons for this are many and complex. These reasons include, amongst others: social change, which is outside the control of the churches; migration into and out of the country; the continuing and relentless fragmentation of settled communities; physical mobility and mass communication. They also include the dissemination of rival philosophies, such as secularism and other religions, which challenge the monopoly of Christianity in Britain; and the change in Christian ethos and the way the church presents itself (pp. 23-24). Government immigration policies may also comprise part of the reason, as many immigrants, including black

immigrants, have brought their own religions or ways of worship, which differ from the ethos of established churches in Britain.

During the post-war period, many Christian denominations, including Pentecostal churches of various categories, were established. The subsequent decline in church attendance among teenagers has led some researchers (Kay & Francis, 1996; Hay & Nye, 2006) to question whether teenagers in England are still religious. However, scholars (e.g. Francis, 2001; Singleton, Mason, & Webber, 2004) have argued that non-attendance at church programmes does not necessarily indicate the absence of religiosity or spirituality amongst individuals, but rather reformation, which has resulted in personalised and private forms of belief. This is what Davie (1994) referred to as "believing without belonging." Meanwhile, Francis (1994), as cited in Francis (2001), maintained that the lack of church attendance should not be categorised as an indication of not belonging, as it is possible for someone to be affiliated to a particular church setting yet not attend the church. Francis (1994) emphasised that "belonging" could be associated with self-identified religious affiliation, "believing" with belief in God, and "practicing" with church attendance (p. 156). Francis therefore described the contemporary situation of low attendance of church in Britain as "believing without practicing." Furthermore, the assumption that most teenagers in the United Kingdom have abandoned their parents' religion to try out other religions or depart completely from any form of religion (Cusack, 2011) has not been found to be a general occurrence among teenagers from all backgrounds. Studies (Burgess, 2011; Hunt, 2002) have shown that teenagers from other backgrounds, especially Black teenagers, still attend church programmes on a regular basis.

Studies have revealed that traditionally, teenage is associated with an increase in religious zealousness (Cusack, 2011) as teenagers search for meaning in life, but the recent emergence

of alternative answers and outlooks have generated increasing interest in the way young people engage with religion and spirituality in the 21st century. Prior to the last century, teenagers, including those growing up in England, had limited alternatives to the religion of their parents; hence they were socialised into religion, namely Christianity with its many denominations. However, the growing preponderance of different worldviews, meanings, and distractions, coupled with the transitional nature of the adolescent stage, has resulted in the assumption that many teenagers experience difficulty balancing the demands of the contemporary world with their religion and spirituality. Even children with a demonstrated interest in religion are assumed to waver during their teenage years as a result of their becoming aware of different and conflicting concepts and belief systems. Many teenagers are even thought to depart from the religion of their parents to try out other religions or abandon any form of religion because of their interest in trying out new things (Cusack, 2011).

However, the aforementioned assumptions about the lack of interest amongst young people in religion have been challenged by the growth of trans-national religions and church denominations, including Pentecostal, as detailed in chapters 4 and 5 of this thesis. Most recent studies on the religion and spirituality of teenagers indicate that a number of teenagers still affirm the importance of religion in their lives, and that some still engage with their professed religion, despite the distractions presented by alternatives to religion and spirituality. These teenagers report that religion and spirituality play a tremendous role in their lives. For example, Kim and Esquivel (2011) maintain that the teenage years are the easiest time to engage with religion because they constitute a period that is characterised by "an existential search for meaning, an enhanced capacity for spiritual experiences, and a process of challenging traditional religious values" (p. 756). It is also a period of spiritual awakening (Fowler, 1981). Lerner *et al*. (2011) affirm that a feature of this developmental stage is coming to understand

the importance of having a positive relationship between one's self and the world around them. As a result, teenagers engage more in religion and spirituality than young children do. Studies (Singleton, Mason, & Webber, 2004; Francis, 2001, 2013; Dandelion & Collins-Mayo, 2010) demonstrate that many young people in Britain, including teenagers, still hold to their religion and can be considered spiritual, although their methods of worship may be different from those of the previous generation. Lerner *et al*. (2006) claim that teenagers who still practise religion experience something that is important beyond themselves, and this enables them to attain a growing sense of transcendence with regard to God, peers, nature, humanity and their religious institution. Lerner *et al*. describe this focus as a shift in a young person's cognitive and emotional orientation from the self to the transcendent, which gives ultimate value and purpose beyond the material and mundane things of life.

Smith and Denton (2005), in a longitudinal study carried out among American adolescents, report that over 90% of their participants professed to believe in God, while only 9% reported that religious faith was not important to them, and another 22% expressed various perspectives on God and religion. In addition, studies on the religion and spirituality of teenagers in the United Kingdom (Francis, 2001, 2013; Vincett *et al*., 2012) have established that many British teenagers are involved in religious activities and could be considered to be spiritual, although the number of teenagers who report being religious in the UK might be significantly smaller than their American counterparts. Nevertheless, evidence abounds that religion and spirituality have a great influence on teenagers. The next chapter discusses some of these influences in detail.

2.6 Chapter summary

This chapter has provided the background for this study on the religion and spirituality of Black churchgoing teenagers in Britain. It has investigated the meaning of religion and spirituality across a range of disciplines and worldviews. It has been argued that the definitions of religion and spirituality vary widely amongst researchers. These discrepancies have been linked to the differing approaches and opinions of the scholars, as well as the aspects of the constructs that they engage with in their study. For the purposes of this study, both the substantive and functional aspects of religion have been deemed important for a complete definition of the term.

In addition, the meaning of spirituality has also been discussed from different scholarly perspectives, and the relationship between religion and spirituality has been examined. In particular, it emerged that spirituality is mostly described as a personal and often transcendental search for meaning and purpose in life. It is mainly linked to the subjects (pathways) of the quest rather than the objects (destinations), as the search may or may not lead to a destination. This is because spirituality can occur within or outside religious settings. Consequently, this chapter has argued in favour of defining spirituality within a religious framework rather than outside it.

This chapter also defined the key concept of teenage, which is the age bracket for the participants in this thesis. The chapter highlights some of the barriers that contemporary teenagers, particularly in developed nations like the United Kingdom, could face in relation to religion and spirituality. The chapter concludes that despite the barriers, some teenagers in the United Kingdom still hold on to their religion and spirituality, although the extent of this varies across communities and cultures. The subsequent chapter discusses the approaches employed

by scholars to study the religion and spirituality of teenagers. It also documents the impacts of these concepts in the lives of teenagers.

Chapter Three: Approaches for Studying the Religion and Spirituality of Teenagers

3.0 Chapter introduction

Social scientists have carried out a considerable amount of research, using both quantitative and qualitative methodologies, on religion and spirituality in general and, more recently, of teenagers in particular, especially in the USA and the United Kingdom. This chapter provides an overview of some of these studies, concentrating on the main issues that they highlight. It also discusses their relevance to this study on the religion and spirituality of black churchgoing teenagers in England.

The focus of the first section of this chapter is the different research perspectives scholars have employed to investigate the religion and spirituality of teenagers in developed nations, especially the United Kingdom, underlining the forms of knowledge generated. In particular, quantitative and qualitative methodologies are distinguished, with consideration given to the evidence each approach produces. First, quantitative methodologies are discussed. Of particular importance is a study by Francis (2001) on the relationship between teenagers' church attendance in England and Wales, and their values. After that, qualitative methodologies are discussed, with particular attention given to a study by Vincett *et al*. (2012) on the transformations that occurred in the religious identities and practices of young, socially and economically included Christians in Scotland between the ages of 16 and 29.

3.1 Quantitative approaches to the study of the religion and spirituality of teenagers

Quantitative approaches were taken in early studies of the religion and spirituality of teenagers. This type of research, particularly in the field of psychology of religion, can be traced to the late Nineteenth and early Twentieth Centuries. Even though sufficient evidence of the capacity

of such approaches to yield empirically sound knowledge did not materialise until the mid-1950s in the field of psychology of religion (Argyle, 1958; Argyle & Beit-Hallahmi, 1975; Beit-Hallahmi & Argyle, 1997). A seminal example of quantitative research in this field is a study conducted by Francis (2001). Francis investigated the relationship between the church attendance of teenagers in England and Wales, and the wider issues of values. Although the nature of enquiry in his study differs from that of the present study, the similarity is in the age bracket of the participants. In addition, Francis' (2001) findings provide useful insights for the present study.

Francis (2001) outlines the five main strands of studies on the role of religion within childhood and adolescence that have flourished in Britain in the last three decades. These strands include, ethnographic methods, which profile the identity of young people who grow up within a range of faith traditions (Jackson, 1997); mapping children's spirituality and measuring it (Hay & Nye, 1998); children and the worldviews project, developed by Erricker *et al*. (1997), as well as, mapping the correlates of a positive attitude toward Christianity (Kay & Francis, 1996). They also include, a series of independent studies, such as, church attendance as a predictor of individual differences among children and adolescents, overseen by Francis and his colleagues. Francis (2001) builds on other independent studies on church attendance. Some of the topics mentioned above, which are relevant to the present study include, the relationship between church attendance and other aspects of life, carried out among 2,000 teenagers between the ages of 11 and 16 (Francis, 1989); attitudes towards school, among 3,962 11-year-olds (Francis, 1992). Others include, television-viewing time and programme preferences, among 5,432 teenagers, between the ages of 11 to 15 (Francis & Gibson, 1993); purpose in life, among 4,014 teenagers, between the ages of 12 and 15 (Francis & Evans, 1996), and substance abuse among 11,193 teenagers between the ages of 13 to 15.

Francis (2001) adopted a positivist viewpoint through a deductive scientific approach (Burton, Brundrett & Jones, 2014), making use of generalisations and hard, quantitative, measurable data. Data for the study were collected through a quantitative survey, carried out among 32,943 teenagers, who identified with a certain Christian faith group. Like many other quantitative researchers, Francis (2001) depends on a large-scale research design and the development of hypotheses through observable and measurable phenomena in order to validate the conclusions that have been generated. The conceptual framework that underpins his study was clear as well as the positionality of the researcher, who took the position of an outsider, as he was independent of the research setting. This gave him the chance to be rational and unbiased in his analysis.

Francis (2001) based the categories of teenagers' church attendance on a five-point scale, which offered as options: 'nearly every week', 'at least once a month', 'sometimes', 'once or twice a year' and 'never.' He specifically considers the relationship between teenagers' church attendance and fifteen areas that had already been identified in the Teenage Religion and Values survey (TRV). These areas were personal well-being, worries, counselling, school, work, religious beliefs, church and society, the supernatural, politics, social concerns, sexual morality, substance abuse, right and wrong, leisure, and the local area (p. 166). The study also considers the demographic features associated with the frequency of church attendance, namely: gender, age, social class and religion. The results of his study show a consistent relationship between church attendance and personal well-being.

Francis (2001) observed that a higher proportion of females (15.5%) than males (13.2%) attend church on a weekly basis, and that more males (53.4%) than females (44.9%) indicated that they never attend church. This suggests that religious practice is more prevalent among females

than males. The age demography of his participants shows that the number of times older teenagers attended church programmes was slightly less (13.9% among year ten students) than the younger ones (14.9% among year nine students), which supports an assumption that parents might have influence on the way teenagers relate with religion and spirituality.

Another feature Francis (2001) took into consideration is denomination. The results show that Pentecostal churches have the highest percentage of weekly church attendance among teenagers (65.9%), followed by Presbyterian (49.3%), while Anglican churches have the lowest teenage church attendance (16.6%). The percentage of teenagers who indicated that they never attend church decreases in the opposite proportion as those who claim to attend church services regularly. Thus, Anglicans have the highest proportion of non-church attendance among teenagers (31.1%), followed by Methodists (16.9%), while for the Pentecostal church, only 4.3% of the respondents reported never attending church services. The findings on church affiliation are important to the context of the present study, which investigates the religion and spirituality of black churchgoing teenagers in one of the fastest growing Pentecostal churches in Britain, the Redeemed Christian Church of God, in Leicester (more details about this denomination can be found in chapter 5).

In addition, Francis (2001) demonstrates a consistent relationship between church attendance and the personal well-being of his teenage respondents. Teenagers who attend church on a weekly basis were more likely to report that their lives have a sense of purpose and they find that life is really worth living than those who never attended church. Although Francis (2001) claimed that teenagers who attend church regularly are prone to worry about their personal relationships with others, this kind of worry can be classified as a positive one. It encourages

them to nurture their relationships proactively, as they think about the consequences of negative influences and making the wrong choices in relationships.

In the section on counselling, the participants in Francis' (2001) study who attended church programmes regularly reported having a high level of personal support from parents, close friends and the church community. These teenagers stated that they are able to discuss their challenges openly with parents, close friends, and even with their pastors when there is a need to do so. The study also demonstrates that teenagers who attend church regularly are more likely to hold a positive attitude towards school than their classmates who never attend church. Specifically, they are more likely to see school as a happy place to be, feel positive about their teachers, and understand that school is preparing them for a better future. However, the results also show that teenagers who attend church regularly are more likely to be anxious about their performance on examinations and about bullying at school, compared to those who never attend church.

Furthermore, Francis' (2001) results reveal a positive relationship between church attendance and work ethic of his teenage respondents. He found that teenagers who attend church regularly are more likely to think about the importance of hard work because they are more likely to connect the job they do to their sense of purpose. As a result of this, they will always seek to do the best job that they can do rather than just what is required to get by. It is also evident from Francis (2001) that there is a strong relationship between church attendance among teenagers and religious belief, although a few of the participants in his study indicated that they do not fully share the conventional beliefs that their churches promote. A very small percentage indicated that they do not believe in God or life after death. This resonates with Francis and Robbins' (2007) notion of 'belonging without believing'. Francis and Robbins (2007) was a

study of the social significance of self-identified religious affiliation among about 34,000 males between the ages of 13 and 15 who were members of the Anglican Church in Wales. The study demonstrates that it is possible for teenagers to identify with a particular denomination, and even attend church services, yet not believe in the core principles of the church. Furthermore, Francis (2001) demonstrates that teenagers who attend church regularly are less apprehensive about the supernatural, and they are less likely to express belief in ghosts, fortune-tellers, horoscopes or black magic than those who have never attended church.

Regarding the relationship between church attendance and social concerns, Francis (2001) found that teenagers who attend church regularly are more concerned about social issues and media than those who never attend church, especially about inappropriate materials and images on television and other public network domains. On the issue of sexual morality, his study demonstrates that teenagers who attend church regularly are more likely to support heterosexual morality, which is a marriage between a man and a woman, and to oppose homosexuality, than their peers who never attend church. Furthermore, he found that teenagers who attend church regularly are more likely to support limiting intercourse to the marital relationship, opposing it outside the confines of marriage, and that they are less likely to approve under-age sexual intercourse compared to those who have never attended church. His participants who reported regularly attending church were more likely to condemn abortion and divorce, while those who attend occasionally and those who never attend were both more likely to express more liberal views on these issues.

On the issue of alcohol consumption and smoking, Francis (2001) found that teenagers who attend church regularly are more likely to consider it wrong to get drunk and smoke cigarettes; they are also more likely to reject the use of drugs, such as heroin and marijuana, while those

who never attend church were also more liberal in this regard. The study also reveals that teenagers who attend church regularly are less likely to make decisions that could be considered socially and morally wrong, such as buying cigarettes or alcohol while under-age, travelling without proper tickets, truancy, and shoplifting, in comparison to teenagers who never attend church. It is also evident in the study that the churchgoing teenagers held a more positive view of their leisure time, reporting that it is always full of activities, than those who never attend church, although the former are more likely than the latter to state that their parents have a significant degree of control over their leisure time activities.

Finally, Francis (2001) found no evidence of differences in the perception of environmental problems amongst those participants who attend church regularly and those who have never attended, as both churchgoing and non-churchgoing teenagers concurred that crime, vandalism, unemployment, drugs and the consumption of alcohol constitute major problems facing the contemporary society. This seminal quantitative study provides useful information about general attitudinal differences between teenagers who attend church regularly and those who do not. The next article that is reviewed in this chapter is a qualitative study.

3.2 Qualitative approaches to the study of the religion and spirituality of teenagers

Evidence abounds in the literature that qualitative approaches are ideal for collecting data that are complex, sensitive and individualistic, and that cannot be explicitly measured or analysed statistically. A good example of this is Vincett *et al*. (2012), who examined the transformations that occurred in the religious identities and practices of young Christians, from socially and economically advantaged families, in Scotland between the ages of 16 and 29. They explained that the choice of this age range was to capture the period when youth are known to make decisions about their religious beliefs and affiliation without the influence of their close family

networks. Although their age bracket is higher than that of the participants in this study, who are black churchgoing teenagers in England between the ages of 13 and 15, the article is relevant in terms of the topic and the nature of their enquiry as a qualitative study. Hence, it provides useful insight into the way research on the religion and spirituality of young people can be carried out qualitatively.

Vincett *et al*. (2012) undertook their study from an inductive perspective, in support of their aim to "show how the changing position of young Christians within the church and the dominant culture encourages a particular approach to Christianity" (p. 295). Vincett *et al*. examined the religion of young people from different denominational backgrounds, different levels of affiliation, including those that are not affiliated to a particular church, and from various social-economic backgrounds. The researchers demonstrated their understanding of the theoretical framework guiding studies about the religion of youth by carrying out their study within the context of the growing literature on this topic. In the article, Vincett *et al*. (2012) acknowledged that their research process was not neutral but rather builds on previous studies on the religion and spirituality of young people, particularly studies that emphasise the rise of religious relativism and individualism among young people in the USA (Smith & Denton, 2005) and connect it to a lack of doctrinal and theological knowledge.

Vincett *et al*.'s (2012) approach was flexible and interpretive, because this allows space for interaction between the participants and the researchers, showing their affirmation of the principle that all social behaviour is "socially and politically embedded" (Boocock, 2013, p. 495). Vincett *et al*. claim that their study bridges a gap between what young people believe and how they believe or factors that influence or shape their religion. Their focus is on the formative Christianity of their young participants. They argue that by focusing on performance, they can

ask how young Christians are re-envisioning, or re-constructing, the Christian religion and how (or if) this is different and distinct from what existed before. This is because "performativity offers a compelling approach for understanding trends towards individualisation and privatisation among young Christians, as well as seemingly contradictory trends towards various new forms of communal ritualization" (p. 499).

Vincett *et al*. (2012), like many other social science researchers, declare that the contemporary position of young Christians in the UK is very different from that of previous generations. They argue that the rate at which many of the previous generations, including the parents and grandparents of their participants, rejected religion has resulted in the large number of unchurched young people in the present day. Vincett and Collins-Mayo (2010) maintain that religion does not have much impact on these categories of young people. Vincett *et al*. (2012) argue, however, that changes in the religious affiliation of Christians, as well as the way the religious composition of the UK shifted in the last half-century, have a great impact on the way young people construct their religion. For example, based on statistics from the Office for National Statistics (ONS), Vincett *et al*. (2012) write that Muslims now amount to 2.9% of the population in the UK, Hindus to 1.0%, and Sikhs to 0.6%. Meanwhile, in Glasgow, the site of their research, Muslims constitute 3.06% of the population, which is significantly higher than the Scottish national average of 0.93% (pp. 296-299). Vincett *et al*. also argue that religious integration has become an important aspect of Britain because of its multi-culturalism, even though young people today are considered to have less religious affiliation and are less likely to identify themselves as members of a particular religion.

3.3 The influence of religion and spirituality on teenagers

While many studies, such as the ones reviewed above, emphasise the positive impacts of religion and spirituality on teenagers, a few, such as Sherkat and Ellison (1999), have argued that religion and spirituality could also have negative effects. For example, Sherkat and Ellison (1999) claimed that teenagers who were born into conservative Protestant families, such as Adventist, Baptist and Pentecostal, were more likely to relate positively to their parents' religion than those from different backgrounds, not because they love religion but because of the fear of punishment, as conservative parents are more likely to emphasise children's obedience to parental authority than more liberal families. It is also evidence that teenagers relate to religion and spirituality in different ways depending on variables such as culture and sub-culture (Smith & Denton, 2005), family customs (Arweck & Nesbitt, 2010), gender (Kay & Francis, 1996; Regnerus & Elder, 2003), age (Francis, 2001), social context (Vincett *et al*., 2012) and personality (Francis, 1989; Francis & Bourke, 2003; Francis, Williams, & Robbins, 2009). In support of this study's aim of investigating the religion and spirituality of black churchgoing teenagers in England, the next section describes some of the effects of religion and spirituality on teenagers, according to previous researchers.

3.3.1 The influence of religion and spirituality on personal wellbeing

It has been argued that the society in which contemporary teenagers live, particularly in the West, such as Britain, is one that is "characterised by the cultural plurality of postmodernity or high modernity, increasing anxiety about risk, rampant consumerism, dislocated families and a major shift towards gender equality" (Singleton, Mason, & Webber, 2004, p. 249). This has made it difficult for many teenagers to cope with life situations, leading to increases in different forms of antisocial behaviour and anxiety, which invariably negatively affect their health. However, evidence abounds in the literature that religion and spirituality provide teenagers

who are active in religious service with the skills to cope with unpleasant situations. For example, Francis's (2001) quantitative findings demonstrate a consistent relationship between church attendance and the personal well-being of teenagers, with evidence that those who attend church on a weekly basis are more likely to feel that their lives have a sense of purpose and are worth living. Francis's study affirms many other empirical studies on the religion and spirituality of teenagers in this regard. For instance, Werner and Smith (1992), and Crawford, Wright and Masten (2006) declare that religion and spirituality help teenagers maintain a positive outlook on life and find meaning in difficult situations. Crawford, Wright and Masten (2006) argue that religion and spirituality facilitate coping in four major ways. Firstly, they build attachment relationships; secondly, they provide open access to sources of social support; thirdly, they guide the conduct and moral values of teenagers; and finally, they offer opportunities for personal growth and development.

Additionally, it is also maintained that religion and spirituality serve as coping mechanisms for dealing with adversity and hardship (Pargament, 1997; Van Dyke & Elias, 2007). Pargament (1999) stressed that religion and spirituality generally enhance positive adaptive coping in times of hardship. Although some scholars have argued that some religious beliefs could lead to negative coping (Pargament, 1999), the majority of social science scholars concur that religion and spirituality lead to positive coping (Francis, 2001; Dandelion & Collins-Mayo, 2010; Mason, Singleton, & Webber, 2007; Savage, Collins-Mayo, & Cray, 2006; Smith & Denton, 2005; Smith & Snell, 2009). Thus, churchgoing teenagers are more likely to cope effectively with stress than their peers who do not attend church (Francis, 2001; Pargament, 1999). Arguably, religion and spirituality help churchgoing teenagers cope with whatever life throws at them, such as depression, suicidal thoughts, and physical or mental problems (Pearce,

Little, & Perez, 2003), because religion and spirituality provide meaning systems that sustain teenagers when they are faced with difficult life situations (Park, 2007).

Pearce, Little, and Perez (2003) examined the relationship between teenage depression and five dimensions of religion and spirituality, namely: church attendance, private practices (e.g. spiritual discipline, prayer), self-ranked religiousness, congregational support (or "positive interpersonal experiences"), and congregational problems (or "negative interpersonal experiences"). They concluded that religion and spirituality generally help teenagers to deal with depression, because the social support that churchgoing teenagers receive from their religious community and the personal resilience they develop as a result of their closeness to God and prayers, prevent or reduce the symptoms of depression. As Francis (2001) reported, the majority of his churchgoing participants claimed to have received a high level of personal support from parents, close friends and their church community, and stated that they were able to discuss their challenges openly with their parents, close friends, and even with their pastors, when they needed help or empathy.

3.3.2 The influence of religion and spirituality on education/academic attainment

Scholars have found that religion and spirituality play a positive role in the attitudes of teenagers towards school and academic attainment, including the way they relate to their school environment, academic achievement and general attitude towards learning (Francis, 2001; Park, 2001). This is in addition to other factors, such as family upbringing, age and gender, which have also been shown to contribute to how teenagers perceive the school environment and how well they perform academically (Johnson, 2008; Kim & Esquivel, 2011). Francis (2001) confirmed that teenagers who attend church regularly are more likely to see school as a happy place to be, feel positively about their teachers, and understand that school is preparing

them for a better future. Johnson (2008), in his review of the scholarly literature, noted that 16 out of the 19 studies he reviewed found that religion and spirituality had a positive influence on teenagers' academic attainment. Johnson argued that Christian beliefs and the teenagers' values, as well as family support, help them fulfil academic commitments, and achieve more, as they are more committed to education and earn higher grades than their peers who never attend church programmes (Regnerus & Elder, 2003).

Park and Bonner (2008) maintain that parental religious involvement, that is, where the whole family socialises through religious activities, is also associated with the higher academic performance of teenagers. Meanwhile, Park (2001) argued that teenagers' religious and spiritual commitment has a greater influence on their academic achievement than family variables such as socioeconomic status and parenting practices. Similarly, Regnerus and Elder (2003) confirmed that churchgoing teenagers who live in poorer areas are more likely to have high academic achievement than their peers who live in the same environment but do not attend church. However, Francis (2001) acknowledged that teenagers who attend church regularly are more likely to be anxious about their examination results and bullying at school than those who never attend church. Still, this kind of anxiety often resulted in positive academic attainment and better support and coping mechanisms to deal with bullying, as churchgoing teenagers in this category are likely to seek help and support in both regards.

3.3.3 The influence of religion and spirituality on moral and social conduct

Studies have consistently shown that there is a positive relationship between the religion and spirituality of teenagers and their moral and social conduct. Furrow, King, and White (2004) confirmed that religion and spirituality give churchgoing teenagers a clearer sense of personal meaning and lead them to exhibit pro-social behaviour. Similarly, Francis (2001)

acknowledged that religion and spirituality are associated with pro-social behaviour amongst teenagers, regardless of where they live. Francis (2001) further associated religion and spirituality with a low rate of delinquency and violence, as religious involvement protects teenagers from negative behaviours by instilling moral values and attitudes, which produce positive behaviours. Churchgoing teenagers are less likely to abuse substances such as alcohol, cigarettes and drugs (Johnson, 2008; Francis & Mullen, 1993), because religion and spirituality are negatively associated with substance abuse (Francis & Mullen, 1993). As mentioned previously, Francis (2001) established that churchgoing teenagers are less likely to condone drunkenness, cigarette smoking, and the use of drugs. They are also likely to consider it wrong to sniff gas or glue. By comparison, those who never attend church tend to be more liberal about all of the issues discussed above.

Furthermore, churchgoing teenagers are less likely to engage in pre-marital sex and more likely to participate in abstinence programmes (Donahue & Benson, 1995). In fact, teenagers who attend church regularly are less likely to make decisions that involve committing any act that could be considered socially and morally wrong. For example, Francis (2001) found that his respondents who attend church regularly are more likely to feel that sexual intercourse should only occur within the confines of marriage, making them less likely than their non-churchgoing peers to engage in under-age or pre-marital sexual activity. Teenagers who regularly attend church are also more likely to oppose abortion, homosexuality, and divorce, than either those who attend occasionally or those who never attend church.

3.3.4 The influence of religion and spirituality on social issues

Research has shown that churchgoing teenagers hold a positive opinion about the role of the church in society because they believe it is the duty of the church to protect the society. For

example, Francis (2001) reported that both churchgoing and non-churchgoing teenagers maintain a high level of respect for the role of the church (as manifested through rites such as getting married and having their children christened or baptised) in society, but that the former are more concerned about the effects of social media and technology on teenagers compared to those who never attend church. Specifically, they expressed concern about the amount of inappropriate materials and images displayed in the media, whether on television, the internet, in magazines or on other public networks. The above points, while covering a wide range of effects of religion and spirituality in the lives of teenagers, shed light on some of the areas where the influence is most pronounced and particularly in the age bracket (13 to 15) considered in the current study about the religion and spirituality of black churchgoing teenagers in England.

3.4 Chapter summary

This chapter has argued that the assumption that most teenagers in the UK have abandoned their parents' religion has not been found to be a general occurrence among teenagers of all backgrounds. A number of teenagers can still be considered faithful adherents of religion and spirituality in England. The chapter also documented the scholarly evidence of the influence of religion and spirituality, especially Christianity, in the lives of teenagers, focusing on those who live in England, which is the context of the present study. Both quantitative and qualitative approaches have been detailed. Although there is evidence that religion and spirituality influence teenagers in many areas of their lives, particular attention has been paid to only those areas which are most relevant to the present study. The next chapter discusses the establishment and growth of the black majority churches in Britain, as a sub-cultural community within the larger British cultural society.

Chapter Four: The Black Majority Churches in Great Britain

4.0 Chapter introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to discuss the religion and spirituality of teenagers who attend black majority churches as a sub-culture within the larger British culture. This is relevant on account of the evidence of consistency in the attendance of church services by black teenagers, who are the focus of the present study. This attendance contrasts with reports of a consistent decline in church attendance among teenagers of other backgrounds in Britain, as documented in chapter 3. Hunt (2002) demonstrated that the rapid growth experienced by black majority churches in Britain is a result of the membership of a large number of young people. This growth has granted increasing visibility to black majority churches in Great Britain alongside the spectrum of long-established churches, as they have moved from a small and insignificant beginning to being quite remarkable organisations.

Scholars (Burgess, 2009; Olofinjana, 2010, 2013) maintain that the Black Majority Churches (BMCs) in Great Britain were founded as a result of the immigration of people from Africa and the Caribbean from the twentieth century until today. British immigration policy, which has supported the transnational migration of citizens of many different countries, opened the doors for a large number of these black immigrants. They came to the country with their children, who have now become adults with children of their own who were born in this Britain. Every day sees the arrival of new immigrants, including those with children and teenagers. Many of these immigrants are Christians from their countries of birth, and they continue to follow the religion in their new place of settlement. Arguably, the growth of black majority churches has affected the social and cultural landscape of contemporary Great Britain and affected the way ethnicity and diversity are experienced (Adedibu, 2013). Although academic opinions about the history of black majority churches are diverse, they are in some ways

related. In this chapter, attention is given to debates about the designation, the history and the growth of BMCs in Great Britain.

4.1 Defining black majority churches in Great Britain

Scholars have argued that in the past, there was no single name for black majority churches (Kalilombe, 1997; Olofinjana, 2013; Trotman, 1992), as studies show that a variety of different terms were initially applied to congregations that were established by black immigrants or whose members were predominantly of African or Caribbean origin, or that had black leaders. Designations such as black-led, African-led, black Christian and black church were adopted at various times and by various writers, but none of these names received unanimous support from black church leaders and black members of the congregations (Olofinjana, 2013). Kalilome (1999) maintained that one of the reasons for the lack of common agreement on the descriptors “black churches" or “black Christian” for the churches in question is that the names did not address the diversity of the congregations of such churches. He claimed that black church leaders also objected to these names because of the assumption that they were imposed on them by long-established, white church leaders, who lacked ‘positive or favourable’ intentions. Trotman (1992) similarly questioned the motive behind the label “African-led,” which was the way African and Caribbean congregations were identified in the early days of their establishment. Also, many of the congregations that were referred to as ‘black churches’ in Great Britain in the past were not exclusively comprised of black people. In addition, Trotman (1992) expressed dissatisfaction with any designation that identifies a congregation by race, arguing that a racial label confers second-class status on the congregation. Instead, he suggested that each congregation should be recognised by the type of the church, such as the distinctive aspects of its worship.

In agreement with Trotman (1992), Olofinjana (2013) argued that churches, including those that are led by black people, should be identified by their conventional names rather than ones that reveal the ethnicity or culture of the congregations, because most of the churches that are led by black people or that have majority black congregations are diverse in ecclesiology, theology and mission. They are also diverse in terms of denomination. For example, some are Evangelical/Presbyterian, while others are Pentecostal. Another area of diversity, as argued by Trotman and Olofinjana, is in the tradition of these churches, as some are holiness-practicing churches, while others are Sabbatarian, i.e. following the doctrine of the Seventh-day Adventist church (Olofinjana, 2013). Many of these churches are also said to differ in belief; for instance, some are Unitarian while others are Trinitarian. In addition, the differences between black congregations include differences in theological stance, as some are said to follow black liberation theology, while the majority follow the prosperity preaching theology (Olofinjana, 2013). The size of the churches also differs, because while some of them have experienced tremendous growth, to the point of becoming a denomination of their own, others are still struggling to grow as independent congregations. Furthermore, the churches vary in origin, as some have their roots in Great Britain, whereas others, like the RCCG, started in Nigeria before being brought to the UK. Such diversity among black congregations contributed to the difficulty in finding a unanimously acceptable name for them.

Sturge (2005) advocated that the word ‘black’ should be retained in conjunction with whatever name was given to congregations that are populated by black immigrants or led by black clergy, as a positive accolade of their identity. He stressed the importance of the identity of black congregations in the midst of the long-established churches in Great Britain. This view resonates with scholars who argue that many teenagers relate to religion and spirituality as a proof of their identity. Ultimately, the compound designation ‘black majority churches’ was

defined and justified at the Churches Community Work Alliance (CCWA) conference by Desrinnah Brown in 1999 during the presentation of a paper entitled, "What do we mean by black majority church?" This descriptor was coined after much deliberation on the names that would receive acceptance by the majority of people, including white people, and would also connote the identity of these churches and their congregants (, 1999). Brown (1999) argued that the name is not limited to churches established by black people, but also includes any congregation which belongs to one of the larger denominations identified as originating in the black community; independent congregations originating in the black community (with leadership and membership mostly comprising black people); any congregation whose leadership is largely or completely black; as well as any Pentecostal congregation in which the majority of the members are black (p. 2). The context of this thesis, the RCCG, falls into one of the categories of the churches described under the term Black Majority Churches (BMCs).

4.2 The history of Black Majority Churches (BMCs) in Great Britain

Academic opinions vary regarding the actual date of the establishment of the first BMCs in Great Britain. Some scholars trace the history of BMCs in the country to the 20th century, when black immigrants started arriving in large numbers. Olofinjana (2013), however, dates the birth of BMCs and black para-churches as preceding the arrival of large numbers of black immigrants. His account traces the history of BMCs to 1906, when the Reverend Brem-Wilson founded a para-church, where the majority of the congregants were of African heritage, in Peckham, London with the name Summer Road Chapel (SRC). The name has long since been changed to Sureway International Christian Ministries (SICM), with its headquarters located in Herne Hill, South East London. Olofinjana (2013) argued that this church's foundation commenced the first phase in the history of the establishment of BMCs in Great Britain because it fell under one of the definitions of the congregations that were to be considered BMCs.

The second phase in the history of BMCs in Great Britain, arguably, began with the founding of the "League of Coloured People" by Harold Moody at the central YMCA in Tottenham Court Road, London on the 13 March 1931. Although it is debatable whether this league was a church per se, it meets the requirement for the definition of BMCs because of its function as a para-church agency that catered to the medical needs of black people in Great Britain in the early days of black immigrants' arrival. Olofinjana (2013) maintained that Moody, a Christian and a deacon in a congregational church at the time of the establishment of the League of Coloured People, who later became president of the London Confederation of the Christian Endeavour Union, came to London from Jamaica in 1908 to study medicine. Olofinjana notes that, after Moody graduated from Kings College Hospital in London and became a qualified medical professional, he was not able to practise as a medical doctor because of his colour and identity as a black man. Olofinjana claimed that Moody's frustration led him to turn his attention to the black people who were living in Peckham at the time, and provide medical care and support for them. This reportedly marked the beginnings of the League.

The third phase of the establishment of BMCs occurred during the 1950s and 1960s. According to the accounts of Kalilombe (1997) and Burgess (2009), many black immigrants came to Great Britain in the 1950s and 1960s after the Second World War. In particular, two categories of black immigrants were reported to have come to Great Britain simultaneously. The first of these comprised black immigrants from the Caribbean islands and Jamaica (about 419 people). It is reported that these people arrived in Great Britain on the 22 June 1948 in the troopship Empire Windrush, which docked at Tilbury. Some of these black immigrants reportedly came for better job opportunities, as there was a shortage of employment in their country after the war, in response to the invitation from the British government to take employment in sectors where there was a shortage of local labour (Adedibu, 2013; Smith, 1981). Kalilombe (1997)

argued that the intention of these black immigrants was not to stay permanently, but only long enough to amass enough money to enable them to live a decent life in their own countries when they return. However, their expectations did not materialise as a result of the "sudden economic crisis of the 1970s" (p. 309). Arguably, this crisis forced many black immigrants from the Caribbean and Jamaica to postpone their return to their homelands, while some of them decided to settle down in Great Britain as citizens, after determining that it was the better option.

The second category of black immigrants to Great Britain were Africans, who were, in particular, West African in origin, such as Ghanaians or Nigerians. Burgess (2009) argues that one of the reasons why it was possible for black immigrants from Africa to come to Great Britain during that period was that British immigration policy was liberal to Africans, especially citizens of Ghana, Nigeria and Sierra Leone; because they were under British colonial rule before their independence in the late 1950s and 1960s (Burgess, 2009; Kalilombe, 1997). Many of these African immigrants are said to have come for educational purposes, as many Africans then (and even now) believed that the British educational system is better than what was (and still is) available in Africa. Kalilombe (1997) acknowledged that many black immigrants also came to Great Britain in order to obtain a higher standard of living, such as good job prospects and good salary expectations. Howard (1987) emphasised that African immigrants, like black immigrants from the Caribbean and Jamaica, believe that Great Britain is:

> A benevolent and just society where, if the streets were not paved with gold, there was at least opportunity for a good living to be made for all who were prepared to work for it. As most white people in the West Indies (and in Africa) were at least relatively rich, few of the (im)migrants were expecting to see white people who were poor and in low status jobs. Neither were they prepared for the realities of poverty, poor housing and racial prejudice which most of them encountered. (p. 9)

It is also argued that some of the African immigrants came to represent their newly independent countries in various ways, as ambassadors and government agents, for example, while a few

came for commercial purposes or to acquire industrial skills. Others came to attain better leadership skills in order to return and take up leadership positions in their homelands or join the educated elite in the part of Africa from whence they came (Adedibu, 2013).

However, when the dreams of these African immigrants to stay for a short time in Great Britain and then return to their homelands did not materialise due to unforeseen circumstances, they were forced to delay their return to Africa or settle permanently as citizens of the UK. The children that were born to these black immigrant families or the ones that came with them from their respective countries adapted quickly to every aspect of their new country. During the 1950s and 1960s, many independent churches were established by black immigrants in Great Britain. In any case, whether one's account begins with the first, second or third phase, there does not seem to be any discrepancy in the various academic accounts of the arrival and settlement of black immigrants in Great Britain. Rather, the accounts only indicate the progression of events. The most important point is that, one way or another, BMCs were established in Great Britain and are flourishing. The next section discusses some of the factors that contributed to their establishment.

4.3 Factors that contributed to the establishment of BMCs in Great Britain

The establishment of BMCs in Great Britain can be attributed to many various factors. Among these are: the expectations and experiences of black immigrants in British society and established British churches; loyalty to congregation brands; the relative coldness of British Christianity to mission work; and the passion of Africans to bring the Gospel back to Great Britain, where it all started (Adedibu, 2013; Burgess, 2009; Kalilombe, 1997; Olofinjana, 2013). Adogame (2010), in his account of the establishment of BMCs, argued that the unfulfilled expectations of black immigrants with respect to British society and life in the UK

led to the founding of such churches. According to Adogame, black immigrants enjoyed a good relationship with some British officials who had previously served in different capacities in these immigrants' countries before they migrated to Great Britain. When they arrived, the immigrants expected these relationships to continue, but many of them were subjected to hostility and hardship in their workplaces, competitive housing schemes, prejudice, and hostility on the street (Kalilombe, 1997). It is argued that the black immigrants were not prepared for this kind of life in Great Britain, as many of them had perceived Great Britain as a land of riches and abundance for everyone.

Thus, the unexpected hostility and hardship, and subsequent dismay caused the black immigrants to shift their hope to the established churches in the country as places of refuge and strength in the face of the difficulties that they encountered. Many of them are said to have joined mainstream British churches, thinking that in this way, they would be able to fit into British society quickly and receive the necessary economic and social support to adjust to their new environment. This hope, according to Kalilombe (1997), was built on the fact that the majority of these black immigrants were Christians from their country of birth, and many of their churches enjoyed links with British and North American churches through their missionary pastors. However, they were disappointed, as their needs were never met by these churches. Burgess (2009) claimed that when many of these black immigrants tried to join mainstream British congregations, they experienced discrimination, rejection, cultural differences, inadequate support and unfamiliar styles of worship.

Additionally, it is argued that the passion of the black immigrants to worship in their own way also contributed to the establishment of BMCs (Becher, 1995; Burgess, 2009; Kalilombe, 1997; Olofinjana, 2010). Arguably, the black immigrants expected to find the same style of worship

they were used to back in their homeland in the mainstream British churches (Becher, 1995), and when this expectation was not met, they decided to leave the established denominations to start independent churches. Burgess (2009) declared that the BMCS were established so that members could practise Christianity in the way they understood it and the way that was familiar to them, in order to be able to express their "cultural ideologies and cultures through their worship and liturgy," as they had done in their home countries (Adedibu, 2013, p. 2).

Meanwhile, Olofinjana (2010) and Burgess (2011) attributed the establishment of the BMCs in Great Britain to the loyalty of black immigrants, especially those from Pentecostal churches, to their home congregations, besides the claim of negligence of British Christians to missionary work. Becher (1995) affirmed that:

> (Black) independent churches began to be formed from the early 1950s. Some black Christians in Great Britain who had belonged to independent churches in the Caribbean and Africa began to build up groups who would meet for prayer and worship and also for social reasons. Often where there was a history of involvement with a particular denomination 'back home', links would be made with the denomination leadership in order to set up branches in Great Britain. In other cases, new organisations were established in Great Britain. All of these organisations fitted into a pattern, which was familiar: they reflected the doctrinal positions, church teachings and social activities, which came from within a black Christian heritage. (p. 8)

It is therefore concluded that the unexpected experiences and unmet expectations of black immigrants with British mainstream congregations, in addition to the hardships they encountered in the wider society, led many of them to depart from the mainstream congregations to start independent churches. Sadly, it is reported that many who left the mainstream churches never returned to any other church, but rather abandoned the Christian faith completely. A few made the decision to remain with the mainstream churches because they represented the denominations to which they belonged in their homelands, such as Anglican, Methodist, or Catholic (Burgess, 2009; Kalilombe, 1997).

Furthermore, many African immigrants who came to Great Britain in the 21st century claimed that they intended to bring the gospel back to the United Kingdom, where, in their view, it all began. This is because, in the past, Great Britain had sent legions of missionaries to other countries, especially Africa (Burgess, 2011). However, since that time, this missionary country had been taken over by secularism. Hence, many black immigrants believe that it is the responsibility of Africans to bring the message back to Britain (Burgess, 2011; Jenkins, 2007). This phenomenon is what Jenkins (2007) refers to as "the Southernisation of European Christianity" (p. 91). Burgess (2011) explains that in the past, mission work was regarded as a movement from the North, whereby North American and British missionaries took the gospel to African countries, but now the trend has reversed, with Africans coming to the West, in particular to Great Britain, to evangelise and found churches. As many black immigrants considered the British way of carrying out mission work to be cold and passionless, it was thought that the best way to evangelise amongst the British was through the establishment of BMCs in Great Britain (Sturge, 2005). This is why the main mission of some BMC congregations is to reach out to black people with the gospel, emphasising aspects of Christianity that they think are crucial to this demographic (Kalilombe, 1997).

Another reason given for the establishment of BMCs is the obligation felt by black Christian immigrants to support other black Christian immigrants, especially the newly arrived (Gerfoff, 2000; Adedibu, 2013). Thus, this was given as one of the goals of the BMCs at their inception. Burgess (2011) maintains that the BMCs served as places of refuge for people of African and Caribbean origin who shared the common experience of strangeness in a foreign country (Burgess, 2011). The BMCs also served as places where the social, economic, emotional and sometimes even the financial needs of members are met; the very needs, which earlier black immigrants had felt, were not being met by the established churches. No wonder then that

Adedibu (2013) referred to this as "assist[ing] in the cultural preservation of migrants in a new culture" and "promoting social integration" (p. 2). According to Anderson and Frideres (1981), and cited by Adedibu (2013, p. 2), the establishment of BMCs "attempts to validate people's culture through socialisation and it affirms the dignity of ethnic group members who might be considered by non-members as having low status." Kalu (2010), as cited by Adedibu (2013, p. 2), also referred to a BMC as "a home away from home" for black immigrants, as these black congregations encouraged the newly arrived to engage positively in their new society as well as transmit their "indigenous cultures and values to their children."

Burgess (2011), in agreement with Kalu (2010), acknowledged that many African indigenes, especially Nigerians, had experienced a substantial amount of adversity in their home countries before coming to Great Britain. Hence, when they arrived and found that there was no support network like the ones available to them in their homeland through missionary and other charity organisations, the BMCs then became "a home away from home, like a community away from home" (Burgess, 2011, p. 439), as a result of the support they found there. However, Gerloff (2000) and Adedibu (2010), cautioned against relying on any of the above factors independently as an adequate and complete account for the establishment of BMCs in Great Britain. Arguably, reliance on any one of the above points as the sole reason for the establishment of BMCs would result in only a partial account of the history of such churches in Great Britain. Kalu (2010) emphasises the need for balance in the way black majority churches propagate the gospel and carry out their worship to avoid segregation from other members of British society. Arguably, the BMCs in Great Britain constitute a sub-culture within the wider British culture. The next section discusses the factors that contributed to the growth of BMCs in Great Britain.

4.4 Factors in the growth of BMCs in Great Britain

There is a consensus among academics that a number of changes have taken place in Great Britain since the foundation of the first BMCs. Many of the black majority congregations have consolidated themselves to the stage of maturity despite their diversity (Adedibu, 2010; Burgess, 2011; Hunt, 2002). There has been enormous proliferation, with many new assemblies being founded every year across Great Britain. Ashworth and Farthing (2009) assert that among the nearly one million adults that are regular churchgoers in Great Britain, a high percentage are black Africans. The attendance of black African adults is high, standing at 49 percent, which is three times higher than the percentage of white adults, which is 15 percent (p. 2). Burgess (2011), quoting from the directory of black majority churches, argues that as of 2011, there were more than 500,000 black Christians in Great Britain, with an estimated 4,000 BMCs nationwide (p. 431). Burgess states further that in 2005, at the time when many historic churches in Great Britain were experiencing closure as a result of low attendance, over one thousand churches were being opened, and the large proportion of these are BMCs.

While it is acknowledged that black people, especially those from Africa, place great importance on church attendance, the reasons for this are varied. For example, Burgess (2011) maintains that black people in the UK attend church on a regular basis because they see it as a place where they can socialise and release tension in a society where individualism and stress are paramount. Many black immigrants find life in Great Britain to be difficult and stressful because of unemployment or underemployment, job insecurity, financial difficulties, and the racial discrimination that many of them experience. Hence, the presence at the BMCs is considered very important, as they are a place where members can participate in the church programmes, which takes their minds off their stress by focusing their attention on God. Norris and Inglehart (2004), as cited in Burgess (2011, p. 439), established that "the experience of

growing up in less secure societies heightens the importance of religious values." In addition, it is also argued that black immigrants take church attendance very seriously because of their belief that believing and belonging go hand in hand. This is in contrast to Davie's (1994) assertion that it is possible to have religious beliefs without belonging to a religious group. Although this may be popularly practised in some other cultures, it is not the case for black Christians, especially those from an African background, because it is their belief that the only way to demonstrate your religious belief is through commitment and belonging to a religious group. In this case, you can only show that you are a Christian by belonging to a Christian congregation.

Another factor is the location of the BMCs at their establishment. Olofinjana (2013) asserted that, at the beginning, when they were still independent churches, the majority of BMCs were located in London, as a result of its high immigrant population and prospects. Being the point of entry into Great Britain for most immigrants, London remains easily accessible to people from Africa and the Caribbean. In addition, as a large modern city, it offered lots of job prospects, which attracted, and still attract, black immigrants, especially those who came to Great Britain for employment. Moreover, the large numbers of immigrants in London provide social and family networks and create a multicultural environment, which allows new black immigrants to settle more quickly than if they move on to other cities. Over the years, many of these BMCs have expanded and have opened branches in other cities with large numbers of African immigrants and minority ethnic groups (Olofinjana, 2013). Among the cities where BMCs are active in contemporary Great Britain are Bristol, Birmingham, Liverpool, Manchester, Edinburgh and Leicester.

However, it is argued that most of the growth that the BMCs experienced in the 21st century came as a result of the establishment of the new Pentecostal congregations, also known as Charismatic congregations. Adedibu (2013) and Burgess (2011) state that the majority of independent black congregations that were established in Great Britain from the 1990s to the present have been set up by Nigerians and Ghanaians, and many of these churches were (and are) in London. Some of them have grown into mega churches, having become unique umbrella denominations with many smaller churches under them, while a few are still struggling to attract worshippers. Adedibu (2013) maintains that many black Christian immigrants who came to Great Britain in the 21st century, whether for employment or to further their education, have decided not to return to their country of birth. After the completion of their studies or after establishing themselves at work, they set up their own independent churches. Many of these churches have no link to other denominations or church establishments, either in the founders' homeland or in Great Britain, while others maintain ties with a larger church establishment. Burgess (2011) found that Nigerians lead fully half of the mega congregations in Great Britain. Examples of these churches include the Kingsway International Christian Centre (KICC), Jesus house parish and Glory house parish (branches of the Redeemed Christian Church of God), Winners' chapel, and New Wine Ministries.

The above-mentioned churches are all located in London, although some of them have branches in other parts of Great Britain. Burgess (2011) wrote that, as of the time of his report, the largest single congregation of BMCs in Great Britain is the KICC, which was founded by a Nigerian Pentecostal minister, Matthew Ashimolowo, in 1992. Adogame (2010) similarly states that the KICC congregation has grown from 300 memberships in 1992 to thousands in attendance at every Sunday service as of 2010. Meanwhile, the Redeemed Christian Church of God (RCCG) is said to be the fastest-growing denomination in Great Britain (Burgess, 2011).

A detailed discussion of the history and growth of the latter denomination in Great Britain is presented in the next chapter because of its importance to the present study.

Another argument concerning the factors that have contributed to the expansion of BMCs in Great Britain was made by Adogame (2010), who attributed their growth to the connection that most of the leaders of these churches maintain with congregations in their homeland. Adogame states that many of these black majority congregations were originally established in the immigrants' homelands, and some receive sponsorship from these home congregations. In addition, the use of virtual space, through telephone cells and the internet, has served as a means by which African immigrants have maintained their identity in countries of settlement, which may be another reason for the size of BMCs. For example, Adogame found that many of the new Pentecostal churches in Great Britain, as in other parts of the world, use websites as a recruitment strategy for new members and as a way of maintaining contact between fellow congregants, both locally and in other parts of the world. They also use this new technology as a means for evangelism, which is "tied to new, global socio-cultural realities" (Adogame, 2010, p. 61). Heisler (2000) also found, as early as the year 2000 that practically all BMCs, especially African-majority ones, had developed and maintained websites in order to transmit their messages around the globe. For this reason, Adogame (2010) urges scholars to pay more attention to the role of media in motivating and sustaining transnational religious activities.

Scholars (Brierley, 2005; Hunt & Lightly, 2001) maintain that another important contributing factor to the development of BMCs in the UK is the presence of young people in them. In fact, it has been argued that the majority of BMC members, especially in new Pentecostal churches, are youths and young adults. For instance, Hunt and Lightly (2001) carried out a study in one of the Pentecostal churches in Great Britain, a BMC, and reported that about 93 percent of the

congregation were below the age of 40, while over fifty percent were below the age of 30 and about 10 percent below the age of 21 (p. 112-113). Brierley (2005) drew attention to the distinction between this population and that of the long-established churches in Great Britain, describing the membership and attendees of the latter as predominantly middle-aged and elderly. In agreement with Brierley (2005), Francis (2001) argued that although there is a general decline in church attendance in Great Britain amongst teenagers, Pentecostal churches are thriving, with about two-thirds of teenage members attending on a weekly basis. The next highest youth attendance rate was claimed by Presbyterians at just under 50 percent, while the least attended by teenagers was the Anglican Church, with a rate of less than 20 percent. Looking at the figures from the other side, Francis (2001) found that the Anglican Church has the highest rate of non-attendance amongst teenage members at almost a third, while the Pentecostals have the lowest rate, with only 4.3% of teenage members claiming to not be regular attendants. Thus, the phenomenal growth of BMCs could be attributed to the large percentage of regularly attending teenagers, especially as teenagers tend to be passionate and are likely to attract or influence their friends and peers with regard to attending church.

Nevertheless, BMCs must be cautious as to how they handle the growth and development they are experiencing in order to sustain it over the long term. Otherwise, they might fall victim to complacency, which arguably drove many young people away from Caribbean churches in the 1990s (Burgess, 2011). Burgess claimed that many second generation members of Caribbean churches abandoned them to join mainstream British churches, start their own independent churches or stopped attending church altogether, because they felt that their leaders were not listening to them.

4.5 Chapter summary

The chapter has critically examined the debate surrounding the designation given to black majority churches in Great Britain and the reasons behind this identification. It has been established that there is no discrepancy between the various accounts of the establishment of the BMCs, whether from the pre-1950s, the influx of the troopship Empire Windrush in the 1950s, or the arrival of African immigrants in the 1950s and 1960s, when black immigrants started coming to Great Britain in large numbers. The factors that led to the establishment of BMCs in Britain have also been presented. This chapter further documented some of the factors that contributed to the rapid growth of BMCs, including the large presence of young people within them. Arguably, many black teenagers within the black majority churches attend church services consistently, which is said not to be the case among many of their white counterparts. The next chapter investigates the establishment of the Redeemed Christian Church of God (RCCG) in Great Britain as a new Pentecostal denomination under the umbrella of BMCs and, arguably, one of the fastest growing denominations in Britain.

Chapter Five: The Redeemed Christian Church of God in Great Britain

5.0 Chapter introduction

Scholars such as Burgess, Knibbe, and Quaas (2010) and Hunt (2002) have argued that there is a connection between religion, identity and ethnicity, especially among young migrants in Western societies, such as Britain. Indeed, research has shown that many of the black majority churches that were established in the 1950s and 1960s in Britain were understood as meeting the faith needs of black ethnic minorities, who had to deal with the problems of deprivation and marginalization, as elaborated in the previous chapter. It is evident that the rise of new Pentecostalism, which is a vibrant form of Christianity, in Great Britain, such as the Redeemed Christian Church of God (RCCG), can be associated with identity building among young people, as it is with providing a sectarian form of religious compensation for alienated black minority groups (Hunt, 2002). Research shows that the RCCG, which is one of the new Pentecostal denominations in the UK, is one of the most well-established and the fastest growing black majority denomination in the UK, with parishes all over the country (Hunt & Lightly, 2001). The growth of this denomination is linked to the peculiarity of its doctrines, practices and style of worship and the vast number of young people amongst its congregants (Burgess, 2011).

Although the spread of the RCCG denomination has raised questions about its influence on British society (Hanciles, 2008; Jenkins, 2007; Sturge, 2005), studies have shown that this denomination has had a positive impact on the lives of many of its members, especially the youth, who constitute the majority (Burgess, 2011; Hunt, 2002). The purpose of this chapter is to present the history and the growth of the RCCG as a unique Pentecostal denomination, firstly in Nigeria, where it was originally established, and then in Great Britain, as the context of this present study. Investigating the RCCG denomination is very important to the present study

because the participants are recruited from this denomination. The chapter begins with a brief history of the Pentecostal Movement Worldwide, as a prelude to investigating the uniqueness of the RCCG, because of the relationship that exists between the two.

5.1 A brief history of the Pentecostal movement worldwide

Johnson and Mandryk (2001) define the Pentecostal movement as encompassing "those affiliated to specifically Pentecostal denominations committed to a Pentecostal theology usually including a post-conversion experience of a baptism in the spirit" (p. 11). Thus, paramount among the movement's beliefs is the believer's second blessing, which is demonstrated by the baptism of the Holy Spirit, accompanied by the physical evidence of speaking in tongues, in most cases through the laying hands of the clergy. This enables each member of the congregation to function harmoniously, using their spiritual gifts to benefit people, both within and outside of the Church community. Arguably, the emphasis on the "Holy Spirit, clerical authority and clerical leadership are counterbalanced by the lay ministry" (Kay, 2013, p. 18), and the empowerment of the Holy Spirit, of the members, encourage the growth of the Pentecostal churches.

While there are divergent views amongst researchers on the origin of the Pentecostal Movement Worldwide, the most popular views are encapsulated in four basic theories. The Providential theory states that Pentecostalism came from heaven through sudden, simultaneous and spontaneous outpourings of the Spirit, while the Historical theory sees Pentecostalism as a continuation of the nineteenth century revival of the Methodist and Holiness movement. The third, the functional/sociological theory describes Pentecostalism as the functional responsibility of the Church towards a given society. Finally, the Multicultural theory traces the origins of Pentecostalism to the early twentieth century revival movement, known as the

Great Awakening in America (Anderson, 2007, p. 43). Of these, the most popular amongst religious scholars is the latter (Anderson, 2007; Robbins, 2004). The revival movement, mentioned as the origin in this view, can be traced to the ministry established by William Seymour on an abandoned property of the African Methodist Episcopal Church, located on Azusa Street, Los Angeles, California, in 1906 (Robbins, 2004).

Seymour, and those who espouse similar doctrines, emphasised the need for believers to experience speaking in tongues as a sign of being born again (Robbins, 2004). Synan (1997) claimed that at the dawn of the Pentecostal movement, "men and women would shout, weep, dance, fall into trances, speak and sing in tongues, and interpret their messages into English" (p. 99), and that they experienced what is known as 'being slain in the spirit'. However, Miller (2009) disputes the notion that Pentecostal worship services are always characterised by people being "slain in the spirit," that is "prophesying, speaking in tongues or having their crutches thrown away by faith-healers" (p. 299). Instead, he maintains that not all Pentecostal churches display the above activities in their worship, and if any of them occur, it is not on a daily or weekly basis. Robbins (2004) argued that some of the teachings of Seymour resemble those of the early Evangelical churches, such as the Baptist, Evangelical Methodist and Episcopalian churches, especially on the aspect of individual conversion. The Pentecostal movement, as established by Seymour, in any case believed in and emphasised followers' individual conversion experiences. In other words, people are not born into Christian faith, but voluntarily choose to become Christians at the time of conversion, an experience that is referred to as being "born again."

However, Kay (2011) provided an incredible history of the growth of Pentecostal movement across the World since the beginning of the Twentieth century. In his study, Kay cited the

works by Gifford (2004), Martin (2002), Maxwell (2006), and Wacker (1988), in relation to the establishment and growth of Pentecostalism in the specific historical and cultural contexts. Kay's descriptive accounts of Pentecostalism include Australia, Brazil, South Korea, and Sweden, given a detailed explanation to its development, including its beliefs and values, within different contexts. Kay (2011) also highlighted the concern on the relationship of Pentecostalism with other Christian traditions, which are different from Pentecostal. While Kay did not disprove the experience at Azusa St. Revival in Los Angeles in 1906, he argued that experience of Pentecostalism dated back to the event of Acts 2 in the New Testament of the Bible, when the Apostles received the baptism of the Holy Spirit. In addition, Kay provided a detailed explanation of the Irvingites, the ministry of John Alexander Dowie, and Methodism, which arguably, led to the later Pentecostal developments. Kay (2011) also documents how Pentecostalism has been shaped over the years by factors, such as race, social exclusion, and doctrinal issues.

It is generally agreed that the Pentecostal movement places emphasis on certain other aspects of Christian life as well, which distinguish it from other denominations. Arguably, the Pentecostal teachings focus on personal encounter or experience of the Holy Spirit rather than just doctrinal formulations. An experience that always moves the experienced to embrace other members of their community with practical expression of the love of God. As Hollenweger (1997) put it, the renewal force of Pentecostalism did not depend on 'a new argument for heads but a new experience for hearts' (p. 191). In addition, Kay (2011) argued that Pentecostalism places much emphasis on the influence of women in the Church, an aspect missing from many long-established Churches. Kay stated that women's roles are important to the establishment and growth of Pentecostalism, as the Church does not discriminate against the service the

members can provide based on gender. On the other hand, women are encouraged to use their spiritual gifts alongside their male counterparts.

Dayton (1987) wrote that the Pentecostal movement is characterised by what is known as the "fourfold pattern of Pentecostal theology," namely: salvation through Jesus Christ; healing through faith in Jesus; baptism of the Holy Spirit; and the second coming of Jesus (pp. 19-23). In addition, the Pentecostal movement also follows strict teachings and practises moralism (Robbins, 2004). Arguably, these teachings and doctrines have attracted many people to the Christian faith, enabling the movement to establish more churches and para-church organisations very rapidly (Anderson, 2004, 2007; Robbins, 2004; Kay, 2011). To Robbins, the teachings and doctrines of the Pentecostal movement permeate different cultural contexts without losing their basic form. This is because the movement allows congregations in other nations to retain their preferred name, such as Assemblies of God (AOG), the Church of God in Christ (CGC), the Church of God (Cleveland), the Full Gospel Business Men's Fellowship International and many others, instead of adopting the generic name Pentecostal.

The freedom of choice regarding names and programmes that are relevant to each location is recognised as a contributing factor in the rapid expansion of the Pentecostal movement at the initial stage of its establishment. During this period, many Pentecostal churches were founded in African countries. The majority of the early Pentecostal churches in Africa followed the teachings and the doctrines of the mainstream Pentecostal movement, especially regarding holiness teaching, which in the African context means strictly maintaining the rules and regulations that are stipulated by the church leaders (Garrald, 2009). Some African Pentecostal churches, however, are more flexible than others with regard to the aforementioned rules and regulations.

At the same time, many Pentecostal churches in some parts of Africa promote teachings about spiritual warfare and deliverance from demonic spirits, which are not part of the classical Pentecostal movement, due to differences in culture and experiences. Some African Pentecostal churches also propagate teachings about absolute faith, which promote health and wealth or prosperity through the promise of both physical health and material success here on earth for believers (Coleman, 2002). Some Pentecostal leaders, including those in Africa, have been accused of taking these teachings to an extreme by discouraging their members from seeking medical attention at hospitals or from doctors when they are sick or forbidding members of their congregation to donate blood or receive blood transfusions when needed (Coleman, 2002).

There are some African Pentecostal churches, such as the RCCG, that could be described as unique, not because of their origins in Africa alone, but because they maintain a flexible approach to the teachings of absolute faith. Such churches preach the power of God to heal, but also encourage their members to seek medical attention when ill, believing that God is able to do the work of healing through the use of prescribed medicines. Many of the African Pentecostal churches also place a strong emphasis on evangelism and missionary work (Adedibu, 2016), encouraging their members to take part in evangelistic outreach, regardless of their educational qualifications and spiritual maturity, claiming that it is the Holy Spirit who enables one to speak, not academic qualifications (Blumhofer, 1993; Lehmann, 2002). Garrald (2009) argues that the passion that many African Pentecostal church leaders have about their belief drives them to spend a considerable amount of time praying, studying the Bible, and preaching the gospel, even without formal theological training. According to Garrald (2009), the nature of the message of such churches is simple and includes practical study of the word of God, prayer, and testimony of what God has done for them. He maintains that the passion

and thought-provoking methods with which African Pentecostal preachers present the message of salvation have resulted in numerous conversions, especially from African traditional religions to Christianity.

In spite of the above, the passion and zeal that African Pentecostal preachers show during preaching should not be mistaken for a lack of theological training; arguably, many African Pentecostal preachers today have a sound theological background gained through attendance at various theological colleges and seminaries. Research (Anderson, 2005) shows that many Pentecostal churches in Africa have established their own theological seminaries, Bible colleges and schools of disciples, where preachers and pastors are trained before they are given the responsibility of leading a congregation either at the parish level or a denomination. Nevertheless, there remain a few African Pentecostal churches where people with no formal theological training serve as pastors.

The RCCG, as mentioned earlier, is Pentecostal in nature, but it differs from other Pentecostal churches due to the history of its establishment and its doctrines. The next section provides an overview of the history of the RCCG in Nigeria.

5.2 A brief history of the establishment of the RCCG in Nigeria

The origins of the RCCG can be traced back to 1952 when a Nigerian farmer, Josiah Akindayo, from the south-western part of the country (home primarily to the Yoruba ethnic group), claimed to have received a revelation from God to establish a church. The first name given to the RCCG was ‘Ijo Irapada’, which is Yoruba for ‘the redeemer church’. Akindayo claimed that the name that the church should bear was divinely revealed to him during a period of personal prayer and fasting. The name was subsequently changed to ‘the Redeemed Christian

Church of God'. Reports indicate that Akindayo was an illiterate farmer who could neither read nor write at the time of the revelation, but through the divine power of God was granted the special ability to spell out the letters of the name of the church (in Yoruba) to be established (Burgess, Knibbe, & Quaas, 2010; Adedibu, 2016).

Prior to the establishment of the RCCG, it is assumed that Akindayo, who had converted to Christianity from a local traditional religion, was a member of an Anglican missionary society (Adeboye, 2007; Burgess, Knibbe, & Quaas, 2010). He later joined Cherubim and Seraphim church, which is known in Yoruba as "Ijo Aladura" (Possessors of Prayer church), where he rose to the position of a prophet. Akindayo seems to have left Cherubim and Seraphim church in 1949 to establish the RCCG, although the church is officially dated to 1952 (Burgess, Knibbe, & Quaas, 2010; Adedibu, 2016). Ukah (2008) reports that Akindayo claimed that God had made a covenant with him as regards the development and sustenance of the RCCG at the inception of the church, claiming that God told him that as long as the conditions of the covenant are fulfilled, God would cause the church to grow tremendously. Burgess, Knibbe, and Quaas (2010) reveal that one of the covenants that God made with Akindayo is that the church would spread to the ends of the earth before the second coming of Christ, and this is the covenant that Akindayo upheld and communicated to his successor. It subsequently became one of the RCCG's mission statements and "one of the driving forces for the global expansion" (Burgess, Knibbe, & Quaas, 2010, p. 101) of the Church, because members, and the leadership in particular, are encouraged to evangelise. Burgess, Knibbe, and Quaas (2010) state that when Akindayo was the leader of the RCCG, the denomination had only thirty-nine branches, and less than a thousand members, mostly from poor families. Arguably, this is partly because of its strict teachings and holiness practice, which was "characterised by anti-materialistic

lifestyle and strict dress codes, and the mode of worship services, which was mostly conducted in Yoruba language" (p. 101).

The history of the RCCG reportedly changed in 1981, when Enoch Adeboye, a former professor of mathematics at one of Nigeria's prestigious universities, the University of Ilorin, took over the mantle of leadership as General Overseer (GO) after the death of Akindayo. This transition period coincided with a period when Nigeria was facing economic decline, political corruption, and oppressive governmental policies (Hunt, 2002). Prior to 1981, Nigeria had witnessed a period of oil boom and prosperity, but this came to a halt as a result of mismanagement on the part of the Nigerian government. After 1981, oil prices collapsed, leading to massive unemployment for many people, a shortage of money and scarcity of food. In an attempt to restore the economy, the government introduced a programme called the Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) in 1986, but this only led to more hardship in the country, as more jobs were lost and massive inflation ensued (Hunt & Lightly, 2001).

Nevertheless, Adeboye, because of his academic knowledge, mastered techniques for connecting with people, especially young adults, was thereby able to attract many young people to the Church through the introduction of certain measures that met the needs of the people at a time of difficulty. He relaxed some of the strict rules that the former leader of the RCCG had set for the Church. The Church sought to distance itself from what was perceived as the corrupting world of Nigerian society at that time by erecting boundaries of impeccable purity, and at the same time, Adeboye introduced a new ethos to the church, the significance of prosperity teachings, in a Nigerian-style. Adeboye began to emphasise the importance of miracles and prosperity in his sermons (Marshall, 2009; Ukah, 2008) and took steps to address the hardship that members of the congregations were facing by introducing different poverty

alleviation initiatives, such as a "sense of community, work motivation and a philosophy of self-help" (Hunt & Lightly, 2001, p. 109). Arguably, the teachings on prosperity and miracles during famine and hardship, which the people of Nigeria were experiencing at that time, coupled with the setting up and implementing of a series of innovative initiatives for members of the RCCG, led many people, especially youth, to join the RCCG. The emphasis on prosperity during that time was in line with the Pentecostal message of health and wealth, which had become global by then (Burgess, Knibbe, & Quaas, 2010; Coleman, 2000; Hunt, 2002).

During this time, Adeboye maintained a close relationship with well-known American Pentecostal preachers and other denominational leaders around the globe (Burgess, Knibbe, & Quaas, 2010). He adopted the same style of church growth as these new Pentecostal churches, namely, offering symbolic and material resources to the members of its congregation through organised civic services (Adeboye, 2005; Adeboye, 2007; Hunt, 2002; Ukah, 2008). According to Hunt (2002), this indicated an ability to react to "the ever-changing difficulties, demands and constraints of everyday existence - not only those brought about by the political state but the broader economic and social conditions" (p. 152). These measures are said to have resulted in the rapid growth of the RCCG, as the Church used its grassroots connection to the problems of the poor as "a potent formula for applying the teachings of Jesus to social problems" (Hunt, 2002, p. 299).

Adeboye concentrated his revival programmes on university campuses, where he was able to attract students and successful young professionals to the church from the beginning of his leadership. These professionals reportedly contributed to the growth of the RCCG at the initial stage of Adeboye's tenure by spreading the news of the Church among their contacts in the social elite. The RCCG experienced rapid growth not only in Nigeria but in many other parts

of the world as well, including Great Britain. The next section discusses the doctrines and fundamental beliefs of the RCCG and their implications for the growth of the denomination.

5.3 The doctrines and fundamental beliefs of the RCCG

The RCCG, like many other denominations, is built on certain fundamental beliefs and doctrines, which cut across language, its origin, and the location of its branches. The first of these fundamental beliefs is in God the father, that He is the Creator of heaven and earth, who made man in His own image and likeness. The second is belief in the Holy Trinity, that the Holy Trinity is the three persons of the Godhead: God the father, God the son and God the Holy Spirit; three-in-one. The Virgin birth, that Jesus was conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary, is the third. The fourth is belief in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, that Jesus was crucified and died for the sins of mankind on the cross at Calvary, and that He was buried, and subsequently rose from the dead on the third day; and that He ascended into heaven and is forever seated at the right hand of God the father. Belief in the Holy Spirit, that He is the comforter and the teacher of all things, who dwells within us, uniting us to Jesus Christ, is also essential.

Belief in the Baptism of the Holy Spirit is likewise fundamental, and this entails the belief that this is freely available to all who believe in Jesus Christ, and is manifested by the gift of speaking in unknown tongues. Salvation is believed to be a gift from God through grace and faith in Jesus Christ, so that all who believe in Him will be saved by turning from sin to repentance, trusting in his death and resurrection, and it entails being born again by the Holy Spirit. Another fundamental belief is in the blood of Jesus Christ, that it was shed for believers on the cross at Calvary, cleanses them from all sin and grants access into the presence of God. The second coming of Jesus Christ, that Jesus will come again to the earth in glory is an

essential belief, and that the dead in Christ will rise, and those who are alive in Christ will be translated into the presence of God for eternity. Last, members of the Church also believe that the Holy Bible is the infallible and authoritative word of God, revealed to direct all men and women to salvation (RCCGUK.org).

In addition to the above fundamental beliefs of the Church, the RCCG also has core doctrines, which guide both the physical and spiritual aspects of its members' lives. Under the leadership of Adeboye, one of the core doctrines adopted by the RCCG is the material and spiritual blessings of God on His people. The Church teaches that God has promised to bless His people both materially and spirituality, but these blessings are not automatic. Rather, they are tied to a condition, which individuals have to fulfil. This condition includes the effort of individuals to advance in their careers (Hunt, 2002). Hence, congregants are encouraged to be diligent and hardworking in whatever career they choose, as members are taught that social status and education are important components of identity construction. In the RCCG, one of the core discussions centres on finance and prosperity, wherein the focus is on money management and accountability. According to Hunt (2002), evidence of this emphasis is found in the large number of seminars, training sessions and practical advice directed towards helping members deal with debt and manage their finances. It is also evidence that members are taught to be the best they can be, stressing the importance of God's wish for believers to achieve in all areas of life: careers, relationships and finance, as well as spiritual improvement. Hunt (2002) also noted that the theology of the RCCG reflects these teachings, as documented in the Church's principal publication, *Impact*, thus:

> To survive, one needs an action plan of career goals, training needs analysis, and a periodic review at least every three months. You cannot go through life trusting that the best will happen. Consider three path finders: What am I good at? What am I interested in? What can I do to obtain a comfortable lifestyle? Write down the vision. Pray about it. Once you are convinced it is for you, act on it. (Hunt, 2002, p. 162)

In addition to advancement in career and education, the Church also encourages members to keep themselves separate from the mainstream society through a strong emphasis on lifestyle purity, strengthened and reinforced by mutually supportive communities. Arguably, the significance of Pentecostal doctrines of purity for RCCG members serves as a means of boundary maintenance for both collective and individual identity (Burgess, Knibbe, & Quaas, 2010).

In addition to the above doctrinal teachings, the Church also has a threefold doctrinal statement. Firstly, the goal of the church is for its congregants 'to make heaven'; secondly, 'to take as many people as possible with us'; and thirdly, 'to have a member of the RCCG in every family of all nations' (Burgess, Knibbe, & Quaas, 2010, pp. 104-105). This doctrinal statement is carried out through the setting of specific objectives, which each parish is expected to strive towards. These objectives include planting RCCG parishes within five minutes' walking distance of every city and town in developing countries, and within five minutes' driving distance in every city and town of developed countries (Burgess, Knibbe, & Quaas, 2010). This doctrinal statement, together with prosperity teachings, distinguishes the RCCG from other Pentecostal churches. Arguably, the passion of the RCCG leadership and members to obey this doctrinal statement has served as a driving force behind church establishment and the mode of evangelism, as the RCCG leadership continues to multiply parishes without any regard to the size of its population. This same doctrinal statement applies at the RCCG, Great Britain, where parishes have been established everywhere without consideration of the proximity to long-established churches. For example, in Leicester, which is the location of this present study, there are at least seven RCCG parishes that are functioning at a church level, not to mention several that are considered to be house fellowships because their congregations are not large enough to be considered a parish (a parish must have at least seven adults).

Furthermore, in agreement with the beliefs about equality of roles between genders in the Pentecostal Church, as noted by Kay (2011), Adedibu (2016) stated that RCCG's Theological perception includes "gender equality, as the General Overseer (GO) of the RCCG, pastor Adeboye, started to ordain women ministers upon his ordination as the GO of the RCCG. Adedibu argues that the RCCG was known to have had gender biased against women before Adeboye took over as the GO. Consequentially, many women have been ordained as pastors, deaconesses, and as members of the "Executive Council of the Church, which is the highest Pastoral Council for the RCCG, particularly, in the UK, when one pastor (Mrs) Janet Adedipe was ordained into this highest position in October 2012" (Adedibu, 2016, p. 83). However, despite gender reconciliation within the RCCG, male supremacy has not been eliminated, as many still recognise the role of men above women, which arguably, might have stemmed from African cultural perception (Adedibu, 2016). The next section describes the establishment and growth of the RCCG in Great Britain.

5.4 The development of the RCCG in Britain

The RCCG, in many regards, is markedly different to the black Pentecostal congregations that have been present in Britain for well over 50 years, particularly in terms of belief, practice and cultural orientation. The divergence between the RCCG and other early Pentecostal congregations in the UK is defined by both theological preferences and social composition. The origins of the church in Great Britain date back to 1995, when Adeboye, the General Overseer of the denomination, came to London for a visit and set up the church, along with three other members (Hunt & Lightly, 2001). Over the years, the RCCG has grown so large that it has become one of the most well-established and the fastest growing black majority denominations in the country (Burgess, Knibbe, & Quaas, 2010; Hunt, 2002). Hunt and Lightly (2001) claimed that, as of the time of their research, the RCCG had become a large

denomination spread across every city in Britain with varying sizes of parishes. Adedibu (2010) found that the RCCG had more than 440 parishes in England alone as of 2011. It is expected that this number would have increased tremendously from 2011 to 2016, the time of the present study. Most members of the RCCG, Great Britain, are black, mainly comprising Nigerians who belonged to the RCCG, Nigeria, before migrating to Great Britain, or who joined the Church after arriving in the UK in order to maintain their Nigerian identity. However, some have also joined the RCCG in Great Britain from other countries, such as Ghana and Kenya; while a few have also joined as new converts who did not previously belong to any church. The next section outlines some of the factors that contributed to the growth of the RCCG in Great Britain.

5.5 Factors that contributed to the expansion of the RCCG in Britain

The growth of the RCCG in Great Britain is attributed to many factors. Listing all of them is beyond the scope of this thesis; hence, only those that are relevant to the aims of this study on the religion and spirituality of black churchgoing teenagers in England are presented. As mentioned in the preceding section, the theological teachings, and doctrinal statement of the RCCG, are unique, and have played a role in the rapid expansion of the Church. Hence, one of the main factors is the stated objective of the RCCG to have churches within five minutes' driving distance in every city and town of Great Britain, as a developed country (Burgess, 2011). This has resulted in indiscriminate church planting in almost every corner of the country. The members of the RCCG maintain that Great Britain has become a mission field because they attribute the decline in church attendance amongst the wider society to the coldness of British Christianity and the lack of evangelistic passion among the earliest established churches. Therefore, the congregants believe that bringing the gospel back to Britain is an imperative commandment from God, which they must obey. They maintain that they should not allow the selfless contributions of the British and American missionaries to the Africans,

in particular Nigerians, when they took the gospel to that continent, to be wasted. Instead, Africans must return the gesture by bringing the gospel back to Britain. Burgess (2011) referred to this as a "reverse mission paradigm" (p. 434). This is shown in the comment of one of Burgess's participants:

> You [British people] brought the gospel to us; now we're bringing back the gospel. There's something wrong, because you have left your foundation. […] All the structures in this country if you check them are Christian structures. You take good care of foreigners, the NHS, your Parliament, the coronation oath that was taken. It's because of the Christian principles you imbibed and the Christian foundation that this nation has. So we need to get back there. […] I want to see God glorified in this country. I want to see our streets change. I want to see Christian leaders. I want to see education changed. I want to see the church taking its rightful place in the nation. (p. 434)

Burgess (2011) argues that the above statement represents the motivation of many RCCG pastors in Britain, who, regardless of the number of their church members, move from one location to another, establishing more RCCG parishes across Great Britain. Another factor in the growth of the RCCG in the country is the provision of support and shelter for black immigrants, especially the recently arrived. In fact, some recognise the RCCG as a congregation where "members find shelter, psychological security and solidarity" (Hunt, 2002, p. 152). The RCCG thus seems to be one of the black majority churches in Britain where the security and integration of members in British society are taken very seriously. Reports show that the RCCG provides ample amenities and support to allow its members to integrate fully into British society within a short time after their arrival. This is due to the support given to members to develop "a sense of their importance, shed their passivity, and [set] goals and ambitions" (Gifford, 1994, p. 531).

Hunt (2002) maintains that the teachings and practices of the RCCG, which provide members with a means of responding to and coping with difficult circumstances in Nigeria, were subsequently adapted to British society. Thus, assistance is provided to black immigrants to adapt to the new surroundings and become self-sufficient. Examples of the support that the

RCCG provides, especially to teenagers and young people, include the African Caribbean Education Project (ACES) and the Novo Centre. These initiatives were set up to help Afro-Caribbean children in London raise their self-esteem and improve their academic performance. These centres also help combat youth-committed offences by providing an alternative social context for youngsters, which offers mentoring and confidence building (Hunt & Lightly, 2001). Arguably, these centres contribute positively to the standard of living of the many African and Caribbean children who are part of the programmes, as well as their parents, who otherwise might have struggled to keep them away from gangs and violence. Such supportive practices of the RCCG verify Jules-Rosette's observation that the growth of new religious movements in Third World countries like Nigeria has come to have wide implications for the processes of globalisation (Jules-Rosette, 1994). For Jules-Rosette, such movements represent the interests and life experiences of distinct and sometimes emergent social groups, such as Africans, but invariably may appeal to localised environments.

Additionally, another factor contributing to the growth of the RCCG is its promotion and cultivation of religious internationalism. However, despite the involvement of the congregations in church planting, media broadcasting of the gospel, literature productions and distribution (Adogame, 2010), evidence of the internationalism of the denomination has not materialised, as the majority of its membership remains Nigerian. The influence of the RCCG amongst people of other cultural backgrounds and churches in Great Britain is a matter of scholarly debate. This topic is not within the scope of this thesis, and further study on it is recommended. The leadership and membership structure of the RCCG in Great Britain is another contributing factor to its growth, because the denomination has a combination of strong leadership at the top and active congregational members, who are ready to exert extra effort for church activities. Ukah (2005) describes this as a 'laity-driven church' (p. 330).

Finally, another factor in the RCCG's expansion is the large number of Nigerian immigrants in the country and the age range of the church's members. Nigerians constitute one of the largest African communities in Great Britain, and this group comprises approximately 99% of the RCCG's membership (Burgess, 2011). The majority of the members are young people. In fact, research (Hunt, 2002) has shown that the RCCG in Great Britain has the highest proportion of young people in their parishes in comparison to other early-established Pentecostal denominations in the country. Specifically Hunt found that, at one particular branch of the RCCG, about 10 % of the members were under the age of 21, more than 60% were under the age of 31, and about 93% were under the age of 41 (p. 152). Arguably, such percentages are similar across other RCCG branches in Great Britain because of the constitution of Nigerian migrants to the country. This is significant in terms of growth because, arguably, a church with young people in attendance will grow, as it is easier for youth to invite their friends to the church, especially those from a similar cultural background, because 'likeness begets likeness'. The overwhelming population of young people in the RCCG is one of the motivations for the present research.

5.6 Chapter summary

This chapter has documented the history of the RCCG, which is one of the denominations of black majority churches in Britain. It is an original and innovative Pentecostal movement because the doctrines espoused by the church are distinct from the sectarian and the millenarian focus of the traditional black Pentecostal movement. Instead, the RCCG has embraced some of the core values of Western society, such as materialism, monetary success, careerism and human potential. Notably, the church has expanded at a time when the mainstream, well-established churches in the UK have experienced a decline in church attendance and membership.

The chapter established that the teachings, values and the overarching ethos of this African Pentecostal Church, as well as the emphasis on equality of opportunity and free choice, have contributed to its growth. This supports Roberts's (1992) argument that one of the growth areas of contemporary forms of religion in the Western world is in churches that meet the needs and aspirations of social micro-strata and ethnic sub-groups, which are likely to propound innovative and easily understood theodicies, which satisfy members' personal spiritual, material, psychological and emotional needs (p. 29). The chapter noted that the establishment of the RCCG in Britain provides a means for young Africans to overcome potential struggles and to fashion their own personal transformations through the recognition of their national distinctiveness, social status, age and gender. These aspects of their identities are continually modified and negotiated, and through their attendance at the church, young members fashion a site of identity construction, which unites various components of their ethnicity.

The RCCG places a large emphasis on attracting new members, prompting it to set out systematically to evangelise Western societies, especially Great Britain, and win converts whatever their race, nationality or (former) creed as a sense of duty. It is evident from the study that the RCCG has provoked a 'revival' in Britain, although not among the White indigenous population, as intended by the Nigerian leaders of the denomination. As noted in the discussion, the vast majority of the members of the RCCG are still black people, mostly Nigerians. This chapter has suggested that it may be necessary to examine the problem of multiculturalism in African Pentecostal churches, particularly the RCCG, in Great Britain as a new study. The next chapter discusses the methodology employed by this study to examine the religion and spirituality of black churchgoing teenagers in England.

Chapter Six: The Research Methodology and Strategies of Investigation

6.0 Chapter introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to discuss the theoretical framework guiding this present study. The chapter is divided into two sections. The first section discusses the philosophical and methodological suppositions that support the study, starting with key philosophical principles of interpretive phenomenology and how they inform the aim of the thesis, that is, to investigate the religion and spirituality of black churchgoing teenagers in England. In this section, the rationale for chosen interpretive phenomenological approach is discussed. In addition, this section provides a detailed account of the methods employed for gathering data for the study. It also explains the context, including the setting, participants' profiles and the researcher's positionality as well as the ethical considerations observed during the process of gathering data. The second section documents the strategies employed for analysing the data. Thus, in this section, the techniques employed in analysing, coding and categorising data gathered during the interviews are discussed. Also covered in this section are the emergent themes. The chapter concludes with a brief summary of the key points.

6.1 Research methodology: The philosophy of interpretive phenomenology

In order to understand the conceptual framework of the present study, it is important to start with the concept behind the framework. Phenomenology, as conceived by Edmund Husserl (1859 - 1938), and cited in Willson (2010), began as a result of a desire to investigate the subjective aspect of individuals, and to reconnoitre values and concepts that are important to an individual's personal life, as opposed to positivism, which advocates for "pure knowledge" through objectivity. The followers of phenomenology tend to take issue with positivism and scientific philosophies because they perceive these approaches as excluding consciousness, which to them, is the principal source of value and knowledge (Moran, 2002). Husserl was

disappointed by his attempts to measure human issues scientifically (Laverty, 2003), and therefore concluded that scientific approaches were "constitutionally unfit to settle questions of value and hence questions of meaning for personal existence" (Bahdra, 1990, p. 19). Consequently, phenomenology started as a desire to investigate the subjectivity of individuals more deeply, and to explore values and concepts that are important to the individual, such as religion and spirituality. Husserl (1907) stated that there is no such thing as "pure knowledge" as advocated in scientific research, arguing that such a proposition, "ignored the fact that psychology deals with living subjects who are not simply reacting automatically to external stimuli, but rather are responding to their own perception of what these stimuli mean" (Laverty, 2003, p. 4). In favour of Husserl's argument, Tanyi (2002) claimed that scientifically grounded methodologies are incapable of addressing many fundamental human problems because pure access to one's worldview can only come through oneself (Bahdra, 1990). Arguably, the followers of phenomenology oppose the use of ostensibly objective scientific methods to conduct research that deals with human subjects because of the notion that there is no true objectivity in anything. Arguments regarding the appropriateness of scientific approaches to studying human issues are beyond the scope of this study; issues relating to human experiences have been studied from both objective and subjective perspectives. However, as Kay (1997) claimed, "the objectivity of phenomenology is objectivity about subjectivity" (p. 276), because even though, it is based on more than one viewpoint, like any other objectivity, it achieves these viewpoints by engaging the feelings, or beliefs of a target person or group.

Ontologically, those who espouse the principles of phenomenology maintain that the world is full of experiential consciousness and that all objectivities have subjective beings as their source (Moran, 2002; Willson, 2010). According to Creswell (2007), ontology is the study of the nature of reality, and reality is understood to be subjective and dependent on the way it is

perceived (Khan, 2014). Phenomenologists believe that "there is no reality other than what individuals create in their heads" (Mason, 2014, p. 51). Arguably, in order to understand research participants, it is important that researchers understand their contexts and the way they live, because an integral part of being human is the fact of their existence in the world (Moran, 2002; Willson, 2010).

Epistemologically, phenomenological researchers are not concerned with generating concepts and theories, as this approach rejects the paradigms of positivism (Moran, 2002; Willson, 2010) because to them, all knowledge is subjective and unique to the experiencer (Schmidt, 2005). Rather, phenomenologists argue that the appropriate way to gain knowledge about the attitudes and behaviour of the research participants is for the researcher to interact with them, because the world of the participant is full of "multiple, contextualised realities" (Mason, 2014, p. 52). Consistent with the principles of phenomenology, scholars (Moran, 2002; Willson. 2010) advocate that phenomena should be studied from the perspective of the research participants.

Although phenomenologists concur on the approach's ontological and epistemological foundations, there is a discrepancy in their definitions of the term itself (Hammond, Howarth, & Keat, 1991). Hammond, Howarth, and Keat (1991) claimed that it is not possible to define phenomenology in a complete way because, as Heidegger stated in a lecture in 1929, cited in Moran (2002), "There is no such thing as the one phenomenology" (p. 4). This is because scholars have implemented the principles of phenomenology in various ways in order to apply the theory to their studies. This is possible because phenomenology gives researchers the flexibility to apply its principles in the way that is most appropriate to their research questions (Schmidt, 2005). In fact, Laverty (2003) claimed that because the human understanding of phenomenology is evolving, there could be no one single way of carrying out

phenomenological studies. Hence, phenomenological theories are viewed as dynamic, which makes it likely that they will continue to change over time. Evidence of the evolving nature of phenomenology is seen in the development of different branches, including transcendental phenomenology, existential phenomenology, hermeneutic phenomenology, and interpretive phenomenology (Burrell & Morgan, 1979; Schmidt, 2005). Below is a brief description of each of these branches.

Transcendental phenomenology is an approach that supports the understanding of the world as a phenomenon with untainted meaning (Burrell & Morgan, 1979; Schmidt, 2005). The followers of transcendental phenomenology discard every assumption of everyday life in search of the transcendental (Burrell & Morgan, 1979). This approach supports the notion that researchers step aside from presumptions of what they think and focus on the world of the participants, as they (the participants) are the experiencers (Schmidt, 2005). This stepping aside is what Husserl called "bracketing." According to him, bracketing encompasses researchers putting away all their previous knowledge, biases, beliefs, and assumptions regarding the phenomenon (Crotty, 1996). Crotty (1996) stated that "Bracketing is a sincere endeavour not to allow one's beliefs and assumptions to shape the data collection process and a persistent effort not to impose one's own understandings and constructions on the data" (p. 20). Husserl (1999) purported that it is important for researchers to 'bracket' themselves completely from the research process in order to produce an unbiased result. Doing this involves researchers bracketing "all our concepts, and in this way, all the models we have to understand the things, animals, people we meet in the world" (Moran, 2002, p. 104).

However, some phenomenological researchers have recently challenged Husserl's early philosophy of bracketing, questioning whether it is possible for a researcher to actually cut him

or herself completely out of the process of research, and whether it is even necessary (Laverty, 2003; Moran, 2002; Schmidt, 2005). An increasing number of researchers have proposed that it is important for phenomenological scholars to be open about their worldviews and potential biases that can impede their research, but not necessarily to attempt to shut themselves out of the research (Burrell & Morgan, 1979; Hammond, Howarth, & Keat, 1991; Moran, 2002;). Rather, researchers of phenomenology are encouraged to write themselves into the research, emulating the trend within qualitative research (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003). For instance, Denzin and Lincoln (2003) stated that researchers should stop viewing bias as a negative thing, because writing oneself into the research can add richness to the study. This perspective has implications for the present research because as a researcher, I identify myself as a Christian, and also share some other common characteristics, such as ethnicity and denomination, with my research participants, which cannot be undone (see the section on researcher's positionality).

The criticism of transcendental phenomenology has given support to other branches of phenomenology, such as existential, hermeneutic, and interpretive phenomenology. Heidegger, one of Husserl's students, proposed these other branches of phenomenology because of his disagreement with the notion of complete bracketing, which is taught in transcendental phenomenology (Moran, 2002; Willson, 2010). Heidegger questioned the complexity and appropriateness of attempting to remove the researcher from the research process completely. Alternatively, he came up with the existential approach, which emphasised embedding the researcher in the study rather than stepping aside (Schmidt, 2005). Existential phenomenology, as promoted by Heidegger, emphasises the world of everyday experience as opposed to the transcendental, which advocates that it be discarded (Burrell & Morgan, 1979).

Another branch of phenomenology is hermeneutic phenomenology. This line of investigation relates to philosophical hermeneutics, primarily to grasp existential issues (Annells, 1996; Thompson, 1990). The last branch of phenomenology is interpretive phenomenology, which emphasises the subjective experiences of the participants in relation to how they and the researcher interpret those experiences (Schmidt, 2005). The hermeneutic, existential and interpretive phenomenological approaches are different from transcendental phenomenology in that they seek existential aspects of human experience, using thematic meanings or common structures of the experience, while transcendental phenomenology pursues universal truths (Schmidt, 2005).

Despite the many branches of phenomenology, Schmidt (2005) observes that there are fundamental principles that are common between them. These are:

> A focus on understanding the lived experience; acknowledging the self as a researcher in the research process; selecting co-researchers who are unique, diverse and willing to talk about their experiences; collecting data that is based on open dialogue and participants' own words; and a belief in the need to remove "knowing" from the Cartesian duality of reality as being something that is remote or separate from the individual. (Schmidt, 2005, p. 93)

However, given the developments within phenomenology, Moran (2002) maintained that phenomenology should not be seen as just a method but as an approach, adopted and modified by many scholars, because of its flexibility and practicability. However, the branch of phenomenology that is employed in this study is interpretive phenomenology. I chose this branch of phenomenology because of its relevance to the aims of this study, which investigates the religion and spirituality of black teenagers as practical experiences (Solomon, 1987).

6.1.1 Theoretical framework: An interpretive phenomenological approach

As mentioned above, the branch of phenomenology employed in this study is the interpretive approach, although most of the other phenomenological approaches have been used previously

to investigate religion and spirituality by different researchers (Hill *et al*., 2000; Pargament, 1999; Willson, 2010; Wright, 2002). In this research, I have deemed an interpretive approach as most appropriate for analysing the collected data. This is because the understanding and interpretation of the phenomenon both from the participants' and the researcher's perspectives play key roles in this study.

The interpretive phenomenological approach adopted for this study concurs in part with Smith's (1996) statement that interpretive phenomenology is about obtaining a description of the participants' typical day-to-day lived experiences, including workload, relationships with others, interactions, experiences of the body, and experiences of time. I used the phrase 'in part' because instead of using the interpretive phenomenological to investigate every aspect of the participants' lives, as Smith proposed, I have used the approach to analyse certain aspects of the participants' lives, specifically their religion and spirituality. In interpretive phenomenology, the fundamental issue is the interpretation that the participants and the researcher place on a particular phenomenon, in this case, religion and spirituality (Smith, 1996).

Using an interpretive phenomenological approach allows the voices of the participants to be heard within scholarly research, in their own descriptions and interpretations of the realities of their religious and spiritual experiences. This allows the subjective aspect of their views to be acknowledged (Edwards & Skinners, 2009). Willson (2010) shows that "experiences are subjective, personal, multi-dimensional, and of significance to the life of people" (p. 69). The interpretive phenomenological approach also gives me, as a researcher, an opportunity to see realities the way others see them, resulting in respect for the subjective views of the participants (Moran, 2002; Smart; 1993). In addition, as an interpretive phenomenological study, this

research is carried out in a "natural" context of religion and spiritual practice, and in a way that is meaningful to the research participants (Moran, 2002). As most of the interviews took place in a church setting, except for a few participants, whose preferred location was their home (for more, see the data collection section). Furthermore, as an interpretive phenomenological study, I was able to delve into the religious and spiritual lived experiences of the participants in order to gain an understanding of their subjective experiences and the personal meanings that they ascribe to the phenomena (Moran, 2002; Wright, 2002). As Moran (2002) argues, "The main contribution of phenomenology has been the manner in which it has steadfastly protected the subjective view of experience as a necessary part of any full understanding of the nature of knowledge" (p. 21).

Additionally, my knowledge, as a researcher, serves as a valuable guide to the investigation of the phenomenon because it facilitates the accomplishment of a comprehensive and meaningful investigation. As Moran, (2002) maintained, it is impossible to rid the mind of the background of understandings that has led the researcher to consider a topic worthy of research in the first place. For example, my knowledge of the research literature and professional practices, as well as my own religious experience, led me to the realisation that research is needed in this particular area. My knowledge, together with the expert advice of my supervisors, also led me to specific ideas about how the inquiry should proceed in order to produce useful knowledge. Therefore, personal knowledge, according to interpretive scholars, is both useful and necessary to phenomenological research, as both researcher and participants carry out the act of interpretation.

The interpretive phenomenological approach that is used in this study does not negate the use of a theoretical orientation or conceptual framework as a component of inquiry. Although in

an interpretive study, a theory is not used to generate hypotheses to be tested, a theoretical approach can still be used to focus the investigation to where research is needed and to make decisions about sample, subjects and research questions (Seale, 2012). Interpretive phenomenology gives room for the likelihood of the interplay between the religion and spirituality of the primary researcher through analysis. For instance, it is possible for the positionality (insider or outsider), age, religion, life experiences, ethnicity, political affiliation, and social status of the primary researcher to influence the study (Moran, 2002). There is a detailed description of my positionality in a section on the researcher's positionality in this chapter.

Consistent with an interpretive phenomenological approach, this study seeks to understand the way the black churchgoing teenagers in England capture the meanings of religion and spirituality as well as the common features of their experiences (Schwandt, 1994; Stark & Trinidad, 2007). It also sets out to discuss the interpretation given to this phenomenon by each of the participants, taking into account various factors that can influence their interpretations. In line with this, the present study investigates religion and spirituality in relation to the experiences and understandings of the participants. In order to deal with the ontological aspect of this study, the following questions are addressed: How do black churchgoing teenagers, particularly the participants in this study, understand and relate to religion and spirituality, through their own experiences and interpretation? In what ways does their context influence the religion and spirituality of the participants? And, how do the black churchgoing teenagers respond to religion and spirituality in the face of distractions or obstacles posed by British society?

Adopting an interpretive approach provides the opportunity to perceive the experiences of each of the participants with regard to their religion and spirituality, including their struggles and aspirations, which are grounded on the argument that each individual's understanding of the world is unique. This uniqueness includes understanding the religious and spiritual experiences of the black churchgoing teenagers from the perspective of an African sub-culture within the larger British society. Lester (1999) asserted that personal knowledge and subjectivity are the two important foundations on which the interpretive phenomenological approach is grounded. In order to achieve this, I had to 'get inside the world of those generating' the phenomena (Bevir & Rhodes, 2002, p. 5). This is because, as argued by Bevir and Rhodes (2002), it is not possible to glean people's beliefs and preferences from objective facts alone. I am aware that allowing the voice of an individual to be heard requires that the researcher possesses some important skills, such as listening, speaking, empathy and rapport building. As a researcher, I possess many of these skills already, although I am still developing, as a novice researcher, who might not be able to elicit highly detailed data within a short time in comparison to seasoned researchers. I understand that it is important to establish a good level of rapport and empathy with the participants in order to glean complex information, such as details about religion and spirituality, which are being considered in this research (Measor, 1985). This study also follows a qualitative methodology to investigate the phenomenon, using semi-structured interviews as the primary method of gathering data. Details are given in the following section.

6.1.2 Method of data collection

In order to answer the questions posed for the present study, personal interviews are adopted as the primary method for collecting data. This is consistent with the principles of interpretive phenomenology, which seeks to gather detailed first-hand information about the phenomenon, mainly in the form of the experiences of the participants (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014). In this

study, the way black churchgoing teenagers understand and engage with religion and spirituality is unearthed through semi-structured interviews. Smith and Osborn (2003) claim that semi-structured interviews are the best method for gathering data in an interpretive phenomenological approach. This is because the interview method "provides a unique opportunity to uncover rich and complex information from an individual" (Cavana, Delahaye, & Sekaran, 2001, p. 139), as it provides space for interaction between the researcher and the participants. As a researcher, I was able to interact with the research participants in an attempt to understand their perspectives on religion and spirituality. The interview questions are structured in line with phenomenological principles, dealing with the *what*, *why* and *how* of the situation, with the research questions serving as guides. The structure and focus of the interview questions provide a framework for the subsequent analysis of the data (Smith, 1996).

The interview questions that were used for the study are open-ended and were administered face-to-face and one-on-one with the participants. Although Patton (1990) argued that interview participants may feel more comfortable discussing personal issues over the telephone instead of face-to-face, because this technique might remove the fear of being judged. However, this seems not to be the case with the participants in the present study, as they all indicated their interest in having a face-to-face interview, even though they were given a choice of both. In addition, they all claimed to be comfortable interacting with the researcher. Furthermore, face-to-face interviews allowed verbal answers to be obtained while non-verbal cues from the participants were observed, and this proved to be very useful during the analysis. Most of the interviews lasted for approximately 40 to 90 minutes. The interview questions were used to assist the participants in telling their personal stories in their own words and styles, in compliance with the interpretative phenomenological approach (Smith, Jarman, & Osborne, 1999). Semi-structured interviews also give room for originality and flexibility, allowing the

researcher to scrutinize further the responses of the participants in order to clarify and interrogate them beyond what has been prepared. They also give room for surprises, as unexpected issues may arise that could offer useful information for the study, as it happened in this study. The open-ended questions also provide better access to the participants' understanding and interpretations of the phenomena.

6.1.3 Research context: Location of the interviews

This study was carried out among black teenagers who are active members of the Redeemed Christian Church of God (RCCG). The RCCG is one of the denominations of the African majority churches in Britain. A detailed description of the context of the study is found in chapter 5 of this thesis. The initial challenge in designing the study was determining the venue for the interviews. Given the fact that the research participants are all teenagers, who spend most of their time at school, in church or at their family homes, my initial consideration was for the interviews to take place in the participants' homes, in public places or at church. However, homes and public places were ruled out, in agreement with the participants, because of the researcher's concern for the protection of the participants' confidentiality in these venues. Generally, the interviews were conducted at the participants' Parishes, but on a few occasions, participants requested to meet at their home for convenience. Their individual wishes were respected. However, I assessed that the home environment was suitable for the interviews, in these cases. First, I went to the house prior to the interview date to assess the home environment, including the availability of a confidential and comfortable place with good lightning and suitable chairs for the participants and the researcher to sit on. I also ensure that there would be no eavesdropping or disturbances during the interview. It was after verifying the appropriateness of the venues, that the interviews were conducted in those homes.

With regard to church venues, prior to the commencement of the interviews, I attended some of the youth programmes organised by some of the parishes (because not all of the parishes have programmes that are specifically tailored to teenagers). The purpose of this was to familiarise myself with the venues and the potential participants ahead of the interview process. Since the venues were familiar to the participants, there were no safety concerns and only a few adjustments were needed to ensure the comfort and confidentiality of the participants. As the participants arrived on each day of the interview, I greeted them and escorted them to the rooms that were allocated by the church pastors. The participants were asked if they needed a beverage, but because we were on the church premises, they all declined. A few minutes were spent exchanging pleasantries with the participants in order to make them feel at home and defuse any worry that the thought of the interview might have caused. I prepared the audio device that I used for recording the interview ahead of time. I made sure that the electronic device was charged and I kept spare batteries as well as a spare recording device on hand. All the interviews were audio recorded and they were later transcribed verbatim in Microsoft Word.

6.1.4 Research context: Profile of the research participants

In keeping with the interpretive phenomenological approach, the original plan was to interview 30 teenagers, but only 27 of the recruited teenagers met the criteria set for selection and were willing to take part in the interviews. These participants were chosen through purposive sampling of black churchgoing teenagers between the ages of 13 and 15 who are members of the RCCG in Leicester. Purposive sampling is defined by Robinson (2014) as "non-random ways of ensuring that particular categories of cases within a sampling universe are represented in the final sample of a project" (p. 32). Sampling enabled me to locate the study within a place, a time and a meaningful group and to avoid unnecessary generalisation. I was able to locate

the thesis as a study of a particular subculture within the wider British culture. I also used sampling as a way of meeting the criteria for rigor, which depends partly on the adequacy of the sample "to supply the information needed for comprehensive analysis" (Yardley, 2000, p. 221). This is because it is argued that the importance of any research depends on the extent to which it contributes to theory or practice (Robinson, 2014). This clarification assists readers of the research with understanding the applications of the study, which can lead to a better appreciation of its immediate usefulness and consequent importance (Robinson, 2014). I went through some rigour in selecting participants for the study. Certain criteria were set. First, the participants must be first, second or third generation black African teenagers. Second, they must be between the ages of 13 and 15. Third, they must be members of the RCCG denomination. In addition, they must have been attending church programmes at least once a week, for a period of at least one year. One of their parents or guardians must attend the church on a regular basis. All of these criteria were assessed through the parents/guardians before the commencement of the interviews. Access to the participants was sought from their parents/guardians and the pastors through verbal and written consent forms, which were signed by these gatekeepers before the participants themselves were contacted, in line with the ethics of engaging minors in research. Further details about the process are found in Appendix B. All of the participants were interviewed after obtaining consent from them and their guardians.

The number of participants is based on the understanding that large samples are not necessarily needed to generate rich datasets because the number of participants depends on the goal and purpose of the study (Stark & Trinidad, 2007). It is also possible to generate rich data from a few participants (Richard, 2015).

6.1.5 The interview process

During the interviews, I developed skills such as rapport building and empathy, in addition to listening and questioning skills, which had been honed over time. Building a rapport with the participants enabled me to gain their trust, which resulted in their willingness to discuss their experiences in a way that exceeds the normal monosyllabic response, which is common in dialogue with teenagers. The majority of the participants in this study were very open and provided detailed accounts of their religion and spirituality, including their struggles to balance being a normal Christian teenager in England with pressure from their African parents, who are not familiar with the way of life in England and wanted their teenagers to act mainly in the African way. A few of the participants were a bit shy at the beginning of the interviews, but became confident as the interview progressed, and spoke fluidly and consistently throughout the interview session. As a researcher, I gave room to the participants to reflect on the issues under discussion because their answers related to their personal experiences and interpretations, while this also gave me the opportunity to do the same. During the interview, I was sensitive to both verbal and non-verbal cues, such as the mood, facial expressions and long pauses, which were useful during analysis. For example, I made use of three modes of thought process, which are essential for communication, namely auditory, visual and kinesthetic. I was able to maintain appropriate eye contact, head nodding, responding with 'um-hmm,' smiling where appropriate, a calming speed of speech and leaning forward in a suitable manner towards the participants, to affirm that I was actively listening and heard them.

Because of ethical concerns about the use of an interpretive phenomenological approach, due to its existential issues, I was very active in attending to the verbal and non-verbal communication of the participants. I consistently monitored the way the interview might be affecting the participants. For example, when one of the participants was discussing her

experience following her parent's marriage separation, I monitored her expressions and body language for cues of awkwardness, shame or emotional breakdown that might occur. I made use of my counselling skills, as a mother of three teenagers, a formal counselling teacher and an education specialist (some of the students I taught in the past have experienced similar problems as those the participants were discussing) to calm the situation. I showed empathy by giving the participant the options of continuing or taking a break from the interview. I also reiterated the confidentiality aspect of the research as regards the use of the information and data protection. In adherence to the interpretive phenomenological approach, questions were also asked in a convenient order.

Consistent with qualitative methods of research, some topics and perspectives arose during the interview sessions, which were not part of the initial interview questions. For example, discussions about tattoos and body piercing among black teenagers and the influence of social celebrities on black teenagers were amongst these surprises. In compliance with the interpretive phenomenological approach, I gave the participants who brought up these topics the opportunity to share their experiences and observations on the subject matter.

Field notes and a diary also formed part of my data collection tools. During the interview process, I made use of my field notes and diary, where I documented the facial expressions and body language of each participant. This documentation helped me to match what the participants said to how it was said when I was transcribing the interviews and during the data analysis. During the fieldwork, I sought, on a regular basis, the expertise and advice of my supervisors and discussed with them the progress of the data collection. This cordial relationship helped keep me on track with the study and manage my time properly. Data collected for this study are analysed in agreement with the principles of the interpretative

phenomenological approach. See the next section in this chapter for detailed information about the data analysis. Finally, it is important to note that although it may not be possible to generalise this study because of its small sample, consistent with all qualitative studies, this study can be transferred to similar studies that are carried out on other groups or other contexts (Smith, 1996).

6.1.6 Researcher's positionality

The positionality of a researcher is significant, especially in a qualitative study, because research is a process, not just a product (England, 1994). Moreover, the dynamism of the research process starts from the relationship between the researcher and the participants (Bourke, 2014). As a result, there is a likelihood that the identities of both the researcher and the research participants can have an impact on the research process. England (1994) maintained that research represents a shared space, space shaped by both researcher and participants, and Bourke (2014) purports that identities do not relate to the way we perceive ourselves alone, but also the way we expect to be perceived by others. In the interpretive phenomenological approach, it is presumed that our biases, such as positionality, as researchers could shape the process of research, and therefore recognising these biases could serve a positive purpose in gaining a greater understanding of how to approach the sampling, research setting, and engagement with the participants (Bourke, 2014).

Asselin (2003), Kanuha (2000), and Merriam *et al*. (2001) claim that the position of a researcher, whether as an insider - who shares the same cultural identity, language, and/or religious practice with the participants, or an outsider - who is a complete stranger to the group being studied, is an important aspect, because it indicates where the researcher stands in relation to the participants. This is in agreement with positionality theory, which recognises

that “people have multiple overlapping identities” (Kezar, 2002, p. 96) from where meaning could be derived. Consistent with this theory, Rose (1985) declared, “There is no neutrality. There is only greater or less awareness of one’s biases. And if you do not appreciate the force of what you’re leaving out, you are not fully in command of what you’re doing” (p. 77). This is why Asselin (2003) encourages insider researchers to collect data with their “eyes open,” while at the same time not assuming they have complete knowledge of the studied phenomenon because other factors will also play an important part in the research process. For example, it is possible for the researcher to have knowledge of the participants’ culture, but there may be subcultural aspects, which the researcher may not be aware of.

While there are some advantages to being an insider researcher, such as easy and rapid acceptance by the participants and open discussion between the researcher and the participants, which can lead to greater depth in the data (Adler & Adler, 1988; Dwyer & Buckle, 2009), an insider researcher also comes with its stigma of compromise. Acker (2000), in considering the question of insider-outsider advantages and disadvantages, maintained that the only way to resolve this challenge is for the researcher to find a way of working creatively within the tensions of this debate. Because locking into a notion of the insider or outsider could be detrimental because of the complexity and interconnectedness of people and the phenomenon being studied. Similarly, Fay (1996) proposed a dialectical approach as a way of preserving the complexity of similarities and differences because “In a dialectical approach, differences are not conceived as absolute, and consequently the relation between them is not one of utter antagonism” (p. 224).

As a researcher, I understand that my identity as a person, including my race, class, gender, sexuality and religion, and my professional identity as a teacher and a researcher, play an

important role in the understanding and interpretation of my data. Many of these aspects of my identity mark me as an insider in this study. For example, I share the same cultural and religious identities as the participants in this study. I am a member of the same church denomination as all of the participants. I also serve as one of the parish ministers where some of the participants worship, and I am a member of the Sunday school team that teaches some of these participants. However, as Mullings (1999) noted, qualitative researchers have a commitment to the plasticity and intricacy of people's experiences, because being a member of a group does not signify complete evenness within the group, nor does not being a member mean complete difference, but each requires the other. Fay (1996) asserts, "There is no self-understanding without other-understanding" (p. 241).

As previously noted, there are many factors that play a part in the way individuals relate to the reality in question, in this case, religion and spirituality. For example, the participants of this study are likely to relate to religion and spirituality differently from me because of factors such as age, personality, family background, and environment (Arweck & Nesbitt, 2010). Arguably, one does not have to be a member of a studied group before one can adequately appreciate and represent the experience of such a group (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009). Rather "an ability to be open, authentic, honest, deeply interested in the experience" of the participants, and dedicated to correctly and effectively represent their experience, are the important ingredients (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009, p. 59).

Although my insider position offers some benefits, such as easy access to the context, a shared background understanding of the phenomena with the participants, and openness to discussion on the part of the participants, I still experienced some difficulty in gaining access to the participants themselves. This is due to delays from the gatekeepers and sometimes the

participants' lack of attendance at church services. Finally, I can confirm that my insider position in this study does not unduly influence the interview process because I disciplined myself through detailed reflection on the subjective process of the research. I achieved this by paying close attention to my personal perspectives and biases that are associated with my insider position.

6.1.7 Ethical considerations

The present research was reviewed and approved by the Warwick Research Ethics Committee before the commencement of the study (see Appendix A for the approved ethics form). First, an enhanced CRB/DBS check was carried out on me, assessing my suitability to carry out research among children/young people and vulnerable adults in England. Second, three different consent forms, one for the parent/guardians, another for the pastors of the participants, and the third for the participants themselves, were written. These detailed the purpose of the study, the extent of involvement of the participants and their rights as voluntary participants, and the confidentiality and data protection rules that guided the study and were adhered to throughout. I provided my name, phone number and University email address on all the consent forms in order to help the participants and their parents to contact me with any queries about the interview (see appendix B). Audio tape recordings and transcripts for this study are stored in a secure place at my home where they cannot be tampered with. This is because keeping data safe and secure is an important aspect of the research process. During the design of the research, priority was given to building rapport, respect and trust with the participants, as I understand that the richness of my data will depend on them. Importantly, I was conscious of not being judgmental of any comments made by the participants because, as a follower of a phenomenological approach, I understand that I must give subjective views of reality principal priority because the participants were the experiencers of the stories that were told.

Reflecting back to the time I was seeking ethical approval, even though I understood that using an interpretive phenomenological approach requires the discussion of individuals' personal experiences and the way they derive meaning and purpose in life, I did not anticipate some of the emotional attachments elicited from some teenagers in relation to their religion and spiritual experiences. Many of the participants discussed with me how they struggle with maintaining their religion and spirituality as black teenagers in England. As some of the research participants are first generation African teenagers, they recounted how they found life in England to be very different from that of Africa and how they were able to adapt ahead of their parents. A few of the participants, even though they are second and third generation, recounted how they struggle with maintaining a balance between pleasing their parents and grandparents, who are keen on raising them as pure African teenagers without giving consideration to their feelings, and the UK society where they were born and are growing up.

In particular, one teenager shared with me the struggle he faced with his identity as a Christian teenager with a White father and a black mother. The boy experienced an identity crisis, as he lives (following the death of his mother) with his African grandmother, who decided to sever every tie with the boy's White father because she blamed him for the death of her daughter. According to the participant, the situation left him with a dilemma of identity, where do I belong, Africa or Britain? Many other research participants also shared their feelings of loneliness for a lack of fatherly guidance and role models due to family separation for economic or domestic reasons. In such cases, one of their parents, usually the father is in either Nigeria, Ireland or London, while they live with their mother in Leicester.

One particular incident that was very emotional for me was related to a particular teenager, who happened to be the oldest child in a house where the parents had separated due to domestic

violence. The participant relayed how the parents kept sending her as the go-between, and how difficult it was, not to be able to stand her ground and tell the truth; due to fear that the erring parent would think she is supporting the other. She reported that her parents continued to blame each other for the separation, which was upsetting for her because she could not rectify the situation.

Initially, I did not give much thought to the personal effects that some of these emotional responses would have on me. I tried not to allow myself to become emotionally attached, making use of my counseling knowledge and experience. I also wrote down my reflections on these issues in a diary in order to help me detach from them. Reflecting on these struggles made me think that there is more to be done in the future to bring awareness of the struggles of African teenagers in England, not just in relation to religion and spirituality, but also in different areas, particularly to African parents and church leaders. The purpose of this is to see if there could be a way to either minimise the struggles or provide relevant support to the affected teenagers. In the meantime, my first focus is the dissemination of this thesis to African church leaders after its completion in order to spread awareness of these struggles. In my opinion, these leaders should be able to provide an avenue for further support for the teenagers and their family members who are in England.

6.2 Strategies for analysing the data

This section details the strategy used to analyse the data gathered for the study. The method of analysis described in this study follows the Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) approach. According to Smith, Jarman, and Osborne (1999), an IPA study must be characterised by the following: a clear focus; strong data; rigour; sufficient space for each theme to be elaborated on; an analysis which is interpretative, not just descriptive, and which

comprises both converging and diverging patterns and themes; and a careful and engaging writing style (p. 24). In addition, this form of analysis must give room for the researcher to understand the lived experiences of individual participants in relation to how they make sense of their experiences. Smith, Jarman, and Osborne (1999) also posit that close interaction between the researcher and the phenomenon is very important in an IPA analysis because it is essential for the researcher to be able to comprehend the meanings that the participants attach to the data, while making use of his or her own 'interpretative resources' (p. 223). As an IPA study, this research is concerned with the meanings, which the experiences hold for the experiencers.

Rigour of analysis and interpretation play important roles in this chapter. The chapter documents the way that the data collected on the religion and spirituality of the black churchgoing teenagers in England was analysed, starting with the importance of IPA to the study. The chapter also justifies the use of the manual method of transcribing the gathered data. Furthermore, it describes the process of coding, which includes the various stages and theme development, in agreement with Smith's (2004) assertion that the quality of the final analysis is determined by "the personal analytic work done at each stage of the procedure" (p. 40). The chapter concludes with a summary of the key points mentioned in the study.

6.2.1 Process of data analysis

Although in an Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), there are general rules to follow, one of the strengths of the IPA approach is flexibility. It allows space for diverse ways of undertaking phenomenological analysis. As a novice researcher, I relied on some previous scholars who have carried out an IPA analysis before me for guidance (e.g. Dahlberg, Todres, & Galvin, 2009; and Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). According to Smith (2004), an IPA

analysis focuses on making sense of the experiences of the research participants. Also, Kay and Kingston (2002) claim that an IPA analysis is "particularly suitable where one is interested in complexity or process, or where an issue is personal" (p. 171), and where a deeper, individualised analysis is needed, as is the case in this research. Analytically, the focus of this study is on how the individual participants perceive and make meaning of their religion and spirituality. This means that as a researcher using IPA, it is my responsibility to highlight the areas that are regarded as important to the research participants by drawing on the participant's own accounts, which reveal important perceptions that may require further scrutiny or give clarity to the studied phenomena.

6.2.2 The process of transcription

After the completion of the interviews, all audiotaped data were stored on a private, secure file set aside for the interviews on my personal computer. I then manually transcribed this data verbatim into a line-numbered transcript (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). The stage of transcribing is described by Bird (2005) as "a key phase of data analysis within interpretative qualitative methodology" (p. 229), and it is recognised as an interpretative act, rather than just a mechanical system of putting spoken sounds on paper, because this is where meanings are created (Lapadat & Lindsay, 1999). I chose to analyse the data that were collected for this study manually instead of using computer software. The rationale for this choice was two-fold. First, this technique preserves the confidentiality and originality of the data. Arguably, using computer software gives room for interference into the research process by external people, regardless of how proficient it is at processing data. Hence, the data could not have been kept solely between the researcher and the research participants. Second, transcribing the data in this way allowed me to familiarise myself with it from the outset. This aspect of familiarisation was useful during categorisation and theme development, and therefore necessary for proper

analysis. In a rigorous stage of the study, I transcribed the interviews of the participants verbatim into Microsoft Word.

The verbatim transcription of all the verbal statements of the participants is in agreement with Langdridge's (2007) and Smith, Flowers, and Larkin's (2009) views that the researcher should make use of the actual speech of the participants as much as possible during analysis. Verbatim transcription was also important because it enabled me to capture the practicality of the meaning of what the participants were trying to convey, rather than dwelling on a grammatically precise description. The transcription gave me the opportunity to enter into the world of the participants, as I was able to write word-for-word the meanings that the participants make regarding their religious and spiritual experiences. In addition to the transcription of the verbal statements of the participants, I also noted non-verbal cues, such as laughter, facial expressions, the emphasis on certain words, and verbal twitches. This helped me to retain the information needed in a way that is 'actual' to the original statement of the participants (Edwards, 1993). The names used in the transcriptions are pseudonyms. This is to protect the identities of the participants from being disclosed to readers of the thesis.

6.2.3 The process of coding

Consistent with the principles of IPA, which is a qualitative methodology, the type of coding used in this study is thematic coding. According to Grbich (2009), thematic coding is "a process of segmentation, categorisation and re-linking of aspects of the data prior to final interpretation" (p. 19). The code for this study was developed manually. Manual coding is important because it serves as a tool for managing data, in particular, in terms of organising segments of related themes. It also assists in the interpretation of data (Crabtree & Miller, 1999). Once the transcription of the interviews was completed, I immersed myself in the data.

This process began with "careful reading and re-reading of the data" (Rice & Ezzy, 1999, p. 259). This reading was useful as it enabled me to identify key words that are important in the study, as I noticed and looked for patterns of meaning and issues of potential interest in each piece of data. It also involved identifying and recording initial common themes or ideas from the responses of the participants that are linked to the research topic or phenomenon, in this case, the religion and spirituality of black churchgoing teenagers. According to Gibbs (2008), this process invariably allows me to establish a thematic framework of a phenomenon. The following few extracts in Table 6.1 show how the process of coding was carried out, in a grid form with my comments on each line of the transcription.

Interview transcription, Jane	**Comments**
R: Can you tell me what religion means to you? J: "I think is like a way of life. It is what separate you from other people and you won't do things that other people without religion will do."	Jane perceived religion as a way of life. In other words, it is a lifestyle. To her, religion distinguishes her from other people, including the choices she makes.
R: Thank you, what is your understanding of spirituality? J: "It is how much you erm… how seriously you take religion. Like how connected you are to your religion; like what you are going to do with religion."	Jane explained the meaning of spirituality as a deeper connection to religion, which is demonstrated in the way the religion is being practised.

Table 6.1: Sample excerpt from an interview transcription.

It is important to note that the process of data analysis in this study is not linear. This is because some potential themes emerged in an obvious way during the transcription, while others became apparent only after a thorough scrutiny; that is, I had to go over the data repeatedly to extract them. According to Shinebourne (2011), "the process of interpretation is dynamic and iterative, engaging the concept of the hermeneutic circle in an interplay between parts and

whole and between the interpreter and the object of interpretation" (p. 21). Thus, I scrutinised each verbatim transcription, the comments' summary, and the field notes taken during the interviews in order to capture the uniqueness of each account and assess themes that arose from each individual transcript (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009; Kay, 1997). In this way, I identified common themes in the responses of the participants; these were then categorised in line with their experiences. I then made a list of key words and ideas derived from the data and what is interesting about them; at the same time, I pondered the relevance and importance of the initial coding that emerged from the interviews (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009).

This list comprised features that appeared interesting for analysis, and are the most basic segment of the raw data that was assessed in a meaningful way. I then arranged these key words into alphabetical order. This arrangement made apparent any repetition of words or phrases. The research questions set for this study were also used as guides for the analysis (Bryman, 2012). Afterwards, I went through these initial key words again to identify any overlap, and this resulted in a reduction of the key words into manageable material for analysis. The key words, which were derived from the answers of the participants, and the research questions were merged together to form the final version of the themes discussed in this study. As Braun and Clarke (2006) argue, a theme captures something important about the data in relation to the research questions, and represents some level of patterned response or meaning within the data set.

6.2.4 The process of categorisation

The next step took me to a long process of looking at patterns across the 27 cases. After looking at all the data, I decided to use the simplified version of IPA, which entails selecting themes across the data while still maintaining the individualistic perspectives, because 27 interviews is a

considerable quantity for an IPA analysis. This method is known as the idiographic perspective. According to Smith, Jarman, and Osborne (1999), an idiographic perspective allows the researcher to "find levels of analysis which enable us to see patterns across case studies while still recognising the particularities of the individual lives from which those patterns emerge" (p. 424). Because of the similarities in the responses of the research participants after the emergent themes were collated across the data, I felt that presenting common themes from the data would still allow the voices of the research participants to be adequately represented in the research. This included presenting surprises from the participants' accounts. Therefore, in agreement with Smith, Flowers, and Larkin (2009), I organised thoughts that are similar together according to their conceptual similarities, and I grouped themes that have polar differences with one another through a divergent process. The key quotes used for coding are pertinent to the research aim. I also engaged in grouping, cataloguing, and relabelling the themes that were highlighted under common headings into common themes. In so doing, I was able to ensure that the themes are not imposed on the data, but rather that they all arose from the gathered data organically (Crotty, 1996; Schmidt, 2005). See Appendix C1 and C2 for details.

An inductive approach to analysis was used, rather than a deductive approach. The emergent themes selected are the ones that captured the important aspects of the research aim, which is investigating the religion and spirituality of black churchgoing teenagers in England, rather than depending on the number of times that a given theme emerged in the data.

6.2.5 Emergent themes

The key emergent themes across all the transcripts were compared in order to gain insight into areas where perceptions and responses were consistent across the participants and areas where their responses were apparently diverse. I evaluated the mode in which each of the themes

linked with other aspects of the data as well as how they contributed to the research questions (Smith, Jarman, & Osborne, 1999).

	Themes	**Description**
1.	Personal meanings of religion and spirituality	This includes personal meanings ascribed to religion and spirituality by the participants.
2.	Perception of church attendance among the black teenagers	This entails the perception of the participants on the attendance of church programmes and other church related activities. It also includes the scholarly perception of the British society as once a Christian society, but which has lost its Christian values.
3.	Beliefs	This consists of the beliefs held by the participants of this study, such as belief in God, Jesus Christ, death, and life after death.
4.	Religious and spiritual experiences	This theme includes the accounts of the participants' religious and spiritual experiences in relation to different areas of their individual lives. These areas cover the choices, personal prayers, Bible studies, outward expression of faith or performance, such as evangelism, charity work, and attendance at church-related programmes, organised specifically for teens.
5.	Societal influences	This includes the way the society influences the religion and spirituality of the participants. In particular, it includes the impact of societal values, social media, fashion, and music, on the religion and spirituality of the participants.
6.	Social contexts influences	This theme includes how the home and upbringing, such as parental church attendance, extended family, and family relationships, influence the way the participants relate with religion and spirituality. The theme also includes the influences of school and peers on the religion and the spirituality of the participants. In addition, this section also discusses the influence of the church as a supportive community, both in the spiritual and social/moral lives of the participants.

Table 6.2: Themes and sub-themes' descriptions.

Thus, six main themes arose for the present study through the merging and grouping of keys words, and sub-themes, as presented in Appendix C1 and C2. These key words and the sub-themes were developed into themes, as presented in Table 6.2 above. The purpose of the table is to provide clarity on the nature of the IPA analysis adopted for this study. Each of these six themes is unique but also affects the others. The significance of these themes, including their

broader meanings and their implications for the present research, is interpreted within the wider empirical research literature (Patton, 1990).

6.3 Chapter summary

This chapter located the study of the religion and spirituality of black churchgoing teenagers within an interpretive phenomenology approach because of its appropriateness to the aim of this study, as explained in the conceptual framework and methodology sections. Consistent with the interpretative phenomenological approach, a detailed description of the context of the study was given, in relation to the profile of the research participants and the positionality of the researcher. It is evident from the chapter that both the researcher and the participants played active roles in the research process through the way the data was gathered. As regards my positionality as a researcher, I followed all the ethical precautions to be sure my positionality does not influence the data gathered for this study (Ely, Anzul, Friedman, Garner, & Steinmetz, 1991).

The analysis section has provided an account of the steps involved in the process of analysing the data in accordance with the interpretative phenomenological approach. The section documented the process involved in thematic coding, starting with the transcription of the interviews, and immersion in the data to extract emergent themes, reading and re-reading for further coding, and reduction of the emergent themes to a manageable quantity of data. The process also included categorising the data into themes and sub-themes for proper analysis, using the research questions as guides. Through this process, it was possible to identify how themes were generated from the original data and to uncover meanings in relation to the way the participants make meaning of their religious and spiritual experiences. As previously mentioned, six themes were generated through this process, with many sub-themes that are

discussed under each thematic heading. The next six chapters discuss each of these themes in detail in relation to the extant literature on the subject matter.

Chapter Seven: The Perception of Religion and Spirituality

7.0 Chapter introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to present and discuss the findings on the perception of religion and spirituality. In line with the extant literature, religion and spirituality could mean many things to many people, depending on the importance they place on it. The findings of this study show that religion and spirituality are important in the lives of the research participants. This contrasts with the findings of scholars such as Flory and Miller (2010), as cited in Cusack (2011), who have argued that contemporary teenagers are no longer interested in religion and spirituality. Arguably, the contemporary teenagers live in a world where, "globalisation is taken for granted, religion is a choice, not an obligation; digital media are profoundly important; denominational labels are completely unimportant; and life is basically to be experienced" (Cusack, 2011, p. 417). The findings of this study rather show that the participants hold religion and spirituality in high esteem. This is demonstrated through their professed belief and religious practice, which is carried out through personal reflection as well as corporate religious worship in the church or attendance of other church-related programmes.

This study shows that the research participants devote a substantial amount of their time and energy to the service of God, due to the importance they place on religion and spirituality. The dedication of this study's participants to religion and spirituality is consistent with the findings of other researchers (e.g. Dandelion & Collins-Mayo, 2010; Francis, 2001, 2013; Kim & Esquivel, 2011; Singleton, Mason, & Webber, 2004; Smith, 2005, 2009) that teenagers are still interested in religion and spirituality, and that many proclaim that it has a positive influence on their lives. This influence includes the values these teenagers hold, their attitudes to learning and academic achievement, and their health and wellbeing.

The participants of this study defined religion and spirituality as multidimensional yet interrelated. Consistent with literature reviewed in chapter 2, the findings show that this study's participants define religion and spirituality in individualistic ways based on their personal understanding of the terms. The number of meanings attributed to religion and spirituality is as diverse as the number of participants. This reflects the uniqueness of each participant and the way they relate with religion and spirituality. These definitions also show that religion and spirituality are multidimensional constructs, as observed in the literature reviewed in the section on the conceptualization of religion and spirituality. Critical analysis of the meanings of religion in this study fall into these categories: substantive and functional beliefs or a set of beliefs and practice, ordinary classification, and legalistic rules of do's and don'ts. Meanwhile, spirituality falls into the categories of: personal beliefs in and connection with God; the outward expression of religion, and mystical experience.

Studies have shown that there is no singular way of defining religion and spirituality because people from every walk of life interpret them as multi-constructs relating to beliefs, faith, church attendance, rituals, and organisational doctrine. It has been argued that the meanings that individuals give to religion and spirituality are personal, even though the construct might be universal. The findings obtained on the perceptions of religion and spirituality in this study are interesting and surprising for two reasons: First, there was a high volume of findings obtained on the diverse meanings that the participants ascribed to religion and spirituality. The second reason is the similarities of the statements of the participants to the other existing studies on the topic from the United States and the United Kingdom.

The account given on the perception of the participants includes illustrative extracts from the interviews, to illuminate key issues in their accounts, supporting the interpretation of their

responses. Consistent with the IPA approach, the inclusion of participants' exact words to illustrate the themes enables readers "to assess the appropriateness of the interpretation" (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014, p. 13). It also "retains the voice of the participants' personal experience and gives a chance to present the emic perspective" of the participants (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014, p. 13). The next section looks in detail at some of the meanings that the participants ascribed to religion.

7.1 The meanings of religion

The meanings that the participants of this study ascribe to religion are as diverse as the number of participants, reflecting their subjective and objective views. A large majority, 21 participants, described religion to include the substantive, connecting it to the belief in God or another higher being(s), and to include the functions of religion in the lives of its adherents. Three of these participants also defined religion to include attendance of church services, in addition to their substantive definitions. Of the remaining participants, two described the word 'religion' as merely terminology - not because religion is not important to them, but because, as they stated, the term 'religion' could be confusing, as it is applied to many beliefs and practices that have no relevance, in their opinion, to the Christian God. One participant described religion as a set of legalistic rules that believers have to adhere to in their different Church denominations. I have further categorised these meanings under three headings: sets of beliefs, institutions, and legalistic rules. These categories are briefly discussed below. The number in brackets following the name of a participant indicates his/her age.

7.1.1 Religion as a substantive and functional belief or set of beliefs

This chapter reveals that religion means a belief or a set of beliefs to many participants. However, not all the participants who described religion in terms of beliefs described it solely

in relation to God. For example, Florence (13) described religion as "what someone believes in. It doesn't have to be… you don't have to be Christian to believe in God because some people believe in God and they are not Christians and some do not even have god in their religion. There are some other religions that believe in God as we do, you know, if you strongly believe in something, it can be said to be a religion." Similarly, Lucy (13) stated that religion is "a general term for a lot of people's beliefs."

Nevertheless, the participants who described religion in relation to God maintained that an active belief in God is essential for anyone who claims to be a Christian. They also demonstrated their knowledge of the roles that religion plays in the lives of adherents, such as shaping or at least influencing the values that they (the participants) hold, the choices they make, and the kind of lives they live. Below are some representative examples of the perception of religion as a substantive and functional construct of beliefs in relation to God.

Joseph (14) described religion as "a belief in a God," while Mary (13) said, "religion is a belief and your faith of who created the world and who does stuff for you." Grace (15) stated that "[religion is] a belief and how it influences your life." Meanwhile, Moses (15) claimed that religion is "having faith in God, knowing that someone is there; something that can save you in… difficult times."

As mentioned above, the participants of this study defined religion to include beliefs or sets of beliefs. Those who defined religion as a belief or set of beliefs in God argued that the term is used to explain the relationship between a human being and a Supreme Being or a Supernatural Being. In this case, because all the participants claimed to be Christians, they said specifically that religion means having faith in God, who is actively involved in the affairs of His subjects.

Not just a passive God, but also one who actively watches the believers and who is able and willing to assist them in their times of need. The participants also maintained that the belief they described is similarly not passive, but active enough to propel them to worship the God they claimed to follow.

Defining religion in relation to practice is in agreement with some scholars, like Maton and Pargament (1987) and Pargament (1999). These scholars placed importance on practices, such as church attendance and commitment to the doctrinal statement of the church institution, in delineating what constitutes a religion. Pargament (1999) argued that defining religion in relation to involvement in an organised religious institution is not harmful, but on the contrary has proved advantageous to those who are involved in it. This is because research has shown that church attendance serves as a source of support for different people at different times, including the participants in this study (Maton & Pargament, 1987). How the participants practise their religion, in terms of church attendance, is further deliberated under the section on the perception of church attendance.

Among the participants who described religion in relation to beliefs or a set of beliefs, three went beyond defining religion within the framework of belief and practice by describing it as a lifestyle, the path of life, or a way of life. For example, Matthew (14) claimed that religion is "a lifestyle that you have to follow," while Felicia (13) saw it as "the type of life you live." Similarly, Jane (13) declared that religion "is a way of life. It is what separates you from other people and you won't do things that other people do." Based on the above definitions, it is clear that the participants do not simply believe for the sake of it. First, the definitions show that the beliefs of the participants have a substance, God. Second, the definitions indicate that the

participants believe with the expectation that religion affects their lives, and they know that believing in God assures them of His presence when they need Him in difficult times.

According to these teenagers, religion encompasses everything they are and do. It is like a life journey. They maintain that it is their religion that guides their way of living, including the decisions that they make and actions that they take on certain issues. This is not to say that all the participants went to this extent in their relationship with religion, but that some of them claimed that before they engage in any activity, whether academic or social, they would consult with God in prayer. For these participants, religion (Christianity) means more than a belief, a practice or the function it performs. Arguably, religion helps these teenagers to shift their focus from the self to the transcendent God, and this gives them purpose and values to live for beyond the everyday things of life (Francis, 2001; Lerner *et al*., 2006). This is no wonder, since instead of defining religion in relation to its sacred substance or functional elements; they defined it as "a way of life," "a path you follow" or "a lifestyle."

Defining religion as a way of life, a path to follow, or a lifestyle is consistent with Pargament's (1997) definition of religion as "a search for significance in ways that relate to the sacred" (p. 11). Pargament maintains that religion is like any journey; it has two dimensions, the "pathway" and the "destination" (p. 12) and the sacred can be either both or part of these dimensions. According to Pargament, beliefs and practice, whether corporate or private, and rituals are part of the pathway, while God or whoever is considered sacred is the destination. For the participants to have defined religion in this way reflects a complete surrender to the will and the way of God. This act of surrendering is demonstrated in one of the popular songs in the RCCG parishes. The song is entitled "I Give Myself Away" and was composed and first sung by William McDowell. The lyrics of the song are:

I give myself away
I give myself away
So You can use me
I give myself away

Here I am
Here I stand
Lord, my life is in your hands
Lord, I'm longing to see
Your desires revealed in me

I give myself away (I want to be used by you)
So You can use me
I give myself away
I give myself away
So You can use me

Take my heart
Take my life
As a living sacrifice
All my dreams all my plans
Lord, I place them in your hands

I give myself away (I give myself away)
I give myself away
So You can use me
I give myself away
I give myself away
So You can use me

The act of surrendering, as demonstrated by the participants in this study, is consistent with the observations of Hood *et al*. (1996), Pargament (1997) and Zinnbauer *et al*. (1997) that people relate to religion in different ways based on the influence that it has on the believers.

However, the participants who proffered a more general definition of religion as a belief claimed that there are people who believe in other gods, citing in particular the god of Islam, and many gods of Hinduism. They were also aware that there is no particular god in Buddhism, as the Buddhists only follow the leader (Buddha). In the same vein, they argued that there are people who religiously believe in other things that have no sacred features, but to them, it is their own religion. This is consistent with Hill *et al*.'s (2000) argument that it is possible for

people to allow things like football or travel to occupy the position of ultimate concern in their lives, and these are seen as forms of religions to them. Arguably, the participants of this study demonstrate their knowledge of what other people might consider to be a religion, even when they do not have the same features as their own self-professed religion (Christianity).

In another sense, Zoe (15) and Anthony (13), described religion as both belief and practice. According to Zoe, religion is "belief in God and going to church," while Anthony (13) stated that religion is "when people gather together to believe in their God and to pray to God to help them in their lives." In addition, Justin (13) declared that religion means "going to church every day." The descriptions of religion in relation to supernatural being(s) as well as practice, as given by this study participants, are not novel; the literature review has shown that scholars in the social sciences, especially psychology and theology, have consistently defined religion in terms of its relationship to the sacred as well as its functional features. Beit-Hallahmi (1975), Chryssides and Geaves (2007), Pargament (1997), Smith (2010), and Zinnbauer *et al*. (1997), are among the scholars who have defined religion to include belief or faith in God or a supernatural being. The perception of religion is characterised by the values and functions of this belief in the lives of its adherents.

7.1.2 Religion as a classification

Two of this study's participants stated that they are not keen to use the word 'religion' because of its diverse meanings. They would rather prefer to be known by the type of religion they follow rather than the generic name of being a religious person. For example, Natalia (15) said:

> I think that religion, in this case Christianity, is just a word, is just like a title given to us. To be a Christian, to me, I think you need to know God for yourself. Go to church for yourself. Don't go to church because 'oh! My mummy is going to the church' and you just follow her. Know Christ yourself and worship him truly. He's the king of kings.

Similarly, Joy (13) stated that:

> It's [religion is] a classification. It's like… an inbox; like you've been put under a name, the way religion is known now. 'Cause usually people would see Jesus as our religion, but He's not our religion, He's our Saviour as Christians.

Natalia and Joy maintained that they would prefer that people refer to them as Christians rather than describing them as simply religious, because, they argue, religion can mean many things to many people. The participants who defined religion this way argued that the way the word is used today is ordinary because it lacks the awe that should accompany a religion. Thus, they stated that they would rather be known by the particular religion they belong to, Christianity. Their argument is based on the fact that, for them, Christianity is not just a religion, it is a way of life. It is a way of expressing their faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, who gave His life as a ransom for their sins. They claimed that Christianity brings salvation to its adherents and should be seen in that light. This is not the first time that discontentment has arisen regarding the terminology used for certain groups in the religious circle, as there was once a dispute on how churches with predominantly black worshippers or leadership should be named. Research shows that many names were suggested, but they were all rejected by the representatives of black churches in the UK, based on the argument that those names did not adequately convey the diversity of the churches in this category. Eventually, they all agreed on the label Black Majority Churches (BMCs). Details of this can be found in the chapter on black majority churches in the UK. However, this is the first time that I observed teenagers expressing their concern for how Christianity is grouped with other religions. This expression of discontentment with equating Christianity to other religions is consistent with the claim of Elliot (2005) that the teenage years are a time when everything is questioned. Elliot argues that many adults are prone to measure teenagers by their own standards, not giving a thought to what the teenagers might think about themselves or issues that concern them. Through the findings in this study, I have realised that *how* religion is classified is as important as the definition of religion that

teenagers hold. For example, the participants who defined religion as just an ordinary term declared that they would prefer to be known as Christians rather than as religious. The next section discusses the description of religion as a set of legalistic rules.

7.1.3 Religion as legalistic rules of dos and don'ts

When asked to define religion, Amos (15) stated, "Religion is like a set of do's and don'ts, like something you have to stick with; like [it] is just straight; what you can do and what you can't do. And [it] is like a code that people follow." The participant, who defined religion as legalistic rules of dos and don'ts, argued that religion sets rules and lays out a code of conduct for teenagers. He specifically mentioned the Ten Commandments in the Bible that God gave through Moses to the people of Israel as they made their way to the land of Canaan. He argued that these commandments form a benchmark in many Christian churches and many congregants are required to follow them.

Additionally, Amos cited the moral codes of conduct that some church leaders propagate and expect their members to follow. Arguably, those who obey these rules are rewarded while those who disobey are swiftly punished. Thus, to Amos, religion is a set of legalistic rules, which tell the faithful what to do or not to do. Arguably, religion is designed to test one's obedience (and disobedience). If anyone adheres to the rules of religion, specifically the ten commandments of the Bible, he or she will be rewarded, and if anyone disobeys, punishment ensues swiftly.

This participant later described God from this perspective, stating that God is like a taskmaster who created everything and put man in charge to nurture it. He maintained that God expects total obedience from His subjects and any act of disobedience is punished. Although I have not been able to verify this claim in other scholarly articles, but in the RCCG, which is the context

of this study, Holiness remains the watchword. As mentioned in chapter 5 of this thesis, the RCCG was characterised by an anti-materialistic lifestyle and strict dress codes at its inception in Nigeria (Burgess, Knibbe, & Quaas, 2010). Although the RCCG has gone through several developmental stages, including a relaxation of the anti-materialism and the dress code (members can now wear whatever type of clothes they are comfortable with in the church without any direct or indirect confrontation with church leaders). Currently, the RCCG, as a denomination, is regarded as one of the prosperity preaching and believing Pentecostal denominations in the world.

Nevertheless, there is still much emphasis on holiness and purity. This includes the expectation of positive social behaviors, exemplified by a strict attitude towards alcohol, smoking, and pre-marital sex, particularly among teenagers (Burgess, Knibbe, & Quaas, 2010). The denomination is also very dogmatic on the issue of divorce, although temporary separation is permitted while an intervention is put into place in the event of a family feud. The doctrines and the beliefs of the denomination (for more about these doctrinal teachings, see chapter 5, under the RCCG) are regularly taught in each parish, whether during Bible studies, organised workshops or through preaching. This is to ensure that all the members familiarise themselves with the doctrinal teachings of the church and align themselves with these teachings. In view of the above, it is not surprising that a teenager who sees his/her friends and peers engaging in the so-called forbidden activities, such as drinking, smoking, or dating, would feel pressured by the demands of religion and view it as being legalistic. However, none of the participants of this study disclosed any intention to leave the denomination, at least not for now. This may be because they are still under the guardianship of their parents, who are all active members.

Reflecting on the different meanings that the participants of this study ascribed to religion leads me to concur with previous scholars, such as Francis and Robbins (2007), Smith and Denton (2005), Marty and Appleby (1991), Pargament (1999), and Zinnbauer *et al*. (1997), who claim that religion cannot be defined as a homogeneous construct. For instance, Marty and Appleby (1991) argued that religion cannot be defined unilaterally because of the many roles it plays in the lives of individuals and in the society. Meanwhile, other academics (Francis & Robbins, 2007; Smith & Denton, 2005) argue that any complete definition of religion should integrate features such as beliefs, practices and private behaviour because religion involves whatever people value in life, whether psychological, social, physical or spiritual (Pargament, 1997). The next section discusses the meanings that the participants attribute to spirituality.

7.2 Perceptions of Spirituality

As with religion, the participants of this study were diverse in their perceptions of spirituality, although all the meanings attributed to spirituality are related to God and how a believer strives to please God, whether in a personal way or within a group of fellow believers. The lack of a homogenous definition of spirituality is not a new thing, as scholars have grappled with this point over the years. No homogeneous definition of spirituality can be gleaned from the literature. Various studies have defined spirituality in numerous different ways, from general definitions to specific ones, such as defining it in terms of relationships. Scholars recognise that lack of a uniform definition of spirituality complicates proper analysis of the construct (Bender & McRoberts, 2012). As argued in chapter 2 of this thesis, many definitions of spirituality emphasise one aspect while neglecting others (Hill *et al*., 2000). For example, spirituality is defined as: "the concrete practices carried out by those who profess a faith" (Doyle, 1992, p. 303); "the presence of a relationship with a Higher Power that affects the way in which one operates in the world" (Armstrong, 1995, p. 3); "the search for existential

meaning" (Doyle, 1992, p. 302); and "a transcendent dimension within human experience, discovered in moments in which the individual questions the meaning of personal existence and attempts to place the self within a broader ontological context" (Shafranske & Gorsuch, 1984, p. 231).

Although Beck (1986) and Elkins *et al*. (1988) have proposed multidimensional frameworks for studying spirituality, which include comprehensive definitions that embrace all of its perceived elements (Spilka & McIntosh, 1996), the participants in this study still defined the concept in different ways. I have grouped the meanings that the participants ascribed to spirituality into three sub-sections based on the extent to which they are connected to each other. The first is a personal relationship to and belief in God; the second is the outward expression of religion; and the third is mystical experiences.

7.2.1 Personal relationship to and belief in God

Among the 27 participants interviewed for this study, 19 integrated spirituality with traditional organisational beliefs and a connection to God. These participants described spirituality in relation to personal beliefs; that is, as stemming from having faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and having the Holy Spirit living inside of oneself. It also means allowing God to take control of everything that one does, as well as living a holy life. Defining spirituality as a belief was very common among the participants of this study. Many of them explained that there could be no real spirituality without the acceptance of Jesus Christ, and practical expression of the belief that is professed. Below are several extracts from the interview participants who described spirituality in relation to personal beliefs and a holy lifestyle.

Anthony (13) defined spirituality as, "When someone is really holy and really believes in Christ," while Goodness (15) described it as "a belief in something you've not seen, but you believe it's there." In addition to defining spirituality in relation to belief, Natalia (15) also described it as connecting to both the personal and the practical. She said:

> The word [spirituality] means to be fully with God; to be fully connected with God in everything you do, to be fully connected with Him. Like, you don't leave the house without praying. You are like, wherever you go, God is with you, and you know that the spirit is living within you.

Concurring with Natalia's description of spirituality, Joy (13) said, "I think that spirituality is with you internally and is with you personally. It's how you have developed yourself following whoever you follow, in my case Jesus, and how you grow closer to [Him]." Joy further observed that to have a full 'connection' with God, the individual has a part to play. According to her, having a connection with God requires that an individual develop herself or himself and grow closer to Jesus.

Joy's description of spirituality in this way is in agreement with the doctrine of the RCCG on Holy living. The RCCG teaches that in order to live a victorious life, a Christian must live a holy life. In actual fact, Holiness is paramount to every member of the RCCG. This is shown in the way the church emphasises the teachings on Holy living and being separated from the world. As a result, members are encouraged to strive for holy living on a daily basis, regardless of where they are. This is demonstrated by Moses's (15) comments. He maintained that spirituality is "desire to know more about God, even though is hard to prove sometimes." Although certainly not every member of the RCCG lives a perfect life of holiness, as this is hard to judge, the expectation of the church leadership is that every member of the church should demonstrate a life that is above reproach in every area and in any position they occupy, whether as a worker or as a student. Looking at spirituality in connection with how a believer demonstrates a life of holiness has caused many people to think that believers who are

struggling with sin have lost their salvation and will not be admitted into Heaven. This has resulted in what can be called 'multiple conversions'. What is meant by this is that some believers, as a result of doubt as to whether they would make it into Heaven, because they have fallen into sin, go out repeatedly to be "born again" several times. This act thus comes as a result of the lack of assurance of salvation and placing too much emphasis on personal effort instead of depending on the power of the Holy Spirit when it comes to living a victorious life unblemished by sin.

Nevertheless, it has been argued that not all concepts of spirituality are linked to religion (Sheldrake, 1992; Spilka, 1993; Wulff, 1997), because, in contemporary times, there are different types of spirituality being propagated. For example, Hill *et al*. (2000) argue that there is a "God oriented spirituality," which emphasises the relationship of an individual with God or other supernatural being, a "world-oriented spirituality," which emphasises the relationship between a person and nature or ecology, as well as "a humanistic spirituality," which emphasises humanity's achievements or potential and natural ability, such as logic and science, to solve the problems of society (Hill *et al*., 2000, p. 58). Critical analysis of the meanings of spirituality in this study shows that they fall into what Spilka (1993), as cited in Hill *et al*., 2000) called a 'God oriented spirituality.' This is because all the participants of this study linked spirituality to religion, and their thoughts about and practice of spirituality fall within the framework of religion. The findings from the interviews show that some of the participants are aware of some of the different types of spirituality being propagated today, yet they still defined spirituality as part of religion. Some of their definitions are, a personal relationship and connection with God, the outward expression of religion, and mystical experiences. The various definitions that the participants proffered resonate with previous studies on religion and spirituality. For example, LaPierre (1994) offered several definitions of spirituality,

namely: the search for meaning in life; an encounter with transcendence; a sense of community; a search for ultimate truth or higher value; and respect and appreciation for the mystery of creation. However, these definitions do not necessarily situate spirituality within the framework of religion, as the participants of this study invariably did. Arguably, there is a connection between spirituality and religion, in this case, Christianity.

Mason, Singleton, and Webber (2007), as cited in Cusack (2011), argue that forms of spirituality which flow from traditional religion, which were the types perceived by this study's participants, could be problematic because "their worldview is grounded in the existence of one or more supernatural beings" (p. 414). This is because it is also possible for an individual to derive ethical ideals from the non-religious domain, which could be outside the individual, such as community standards or someone that the person sees as a role model. For example, a child could decide to behave like his or parents, an admired teacher or an exemplary adult in the community. The findings of this study show that, although the participants recognised the importance of role models and community standards, as described in the section on the influence of social contexts. However, there is no evidence to suggest that there is any problem with the perception of spirituality among the participants, as they are mostly influenced by their relationship and the belief they hold about God. They also maintained that this spirituality is demonstrated to the world through the way they live and behave in the society. Defining spirituality in relation to the outward expression of one's religion is in agreement with Wright's (2000) definition of spirituality as "the relationship of an individual, within a community and tradition, to that which is, or is perceived to be, the ultimate truth…" (p. 104). The findings show that spirituality should not be a hidden thing, but something that should be show cased for others to see.

7.2.2 Outward expression of religion

Five participants described spirituality as the outward expression of religion. These participants maintained that spirituality is best demonstrated through the extent to which believers are committed to religious services and church attendance and through the way they live out their faith in God. For instance, Jane (13) described spirituality as:

> I think it's [spirituality is] like, when you focus on religion; like how much you, erm, how seriously you take religion. Like how connected you are to your religion; like what you are going to do with religion. Spirituality is like, when you say you are a Christian, you make it your way of life.

Felicia (13) similarly maintained that "spirituality is the way you behave towards religion." Additionally, Peace (13) said: "[spirituality is] the way I conduct myself," alluding to the way a Christian comes across to people outside Christianity. The description of spirituality as an outward expression of faith shows that spirituality, to these participants, is not just a personal or private matter; rather, it is something that is to be manifested for others to see. This is because, according to Matthew (14), spirituality shows "the depth that you go into in your religion" and "how you feel about your religion" (Eunice, 13). Defining spirituality in relation to the way a believer comes across to those who do not share their beliefs is in agreement with the teachings of Jesus Christ on the Mount (the Beatitudes) in Matthew 5:14-15, where Jesus taught the disciples that:

> Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hid. Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick; and it giveth light unto all that are in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven. (The King James Version)

The participants of this study argue that true spirituality should be manifested to others and not just kept to oneself. The next section presents the findings on spirituality as a mystical experience.

7.2.3 Mystical experience

In this study, the participant used the term mystical experience to indicate a supernatural encounter or experience that shows the awesomeness of God. The participant who defined spirituality in this way claimed that it should be perceived not just as a personal, practical or outward expression of faith, but from the perspective of God, who in all awesomeness bestows His Spirit on the believers. Although only one of the participants perceived spiritual experience in this way, I nevertheless think it is essential to make his voice heard in this research. Arguably, it is possible for many people to have described experiencing a position that is beyond the physical, which has brought them closer to God, or who have seen a miraculous act of God, which has profoundly affected their perception of God, yet whose voices might not have been heard in the literature. According to this study's participant, Shimon (14), *"*it's [spiritual experience is] like something beyond the physical... I can describe it as something beyond the physical. Something you cannot describe, but you know is there in you."

In most cases, those who describe their spiritual experience in relation to mystical acts of God have declared that the experience is beyond physical description, but was a real event in their lives, whether it was a miraculous act of God or a personal encounter with God. For example, one of this study's participants, Joseph (14), when describing his knowledge regarding the reality of the existence of God, said: "I know God is real because I've seen miracles happen." Miracle, as used here by Joseph, refers to a supernatural act of God at a time when all hope is gone. In the RCCG, where the participants of this study were recruited, miracles are common experiences, especially during special programmes such as the 'Festival of Life' (also known as the 'Holy Ghost service' in Nigeria). This programme is held once a month in Nigeria and twice a year in London. During the Festival of Life events, which are attended by many RCCG members within and outside the UK and led by the General Overseer of the RCCG, Pastor

Adeboye, numerous miracles are reported to occur. These include instant healings, deliverance from satanic oppression and possession, and many others, depending on the 'move of the Holy Spirit', as the GO would proclaim. As a result, it is possible for the participants to have witnessed these miracles on a personal basis or seen miracles happen to others, thereby bringing them into a closer relationship with God.

Additionally, the findings in this study show that spirituality is defined as a mystical experience. In other words, a spiritual person is one who has submitted his/her will, purpose and life to God. This experience occurs when an individual has pledged total submission to the way and will of God. This definition illustrates spiritual experience as something that is beyond the physical, something that cannot be described, but is nonetheless real. Arguably, reality is not measured by what can be seen physically or comprehended psychologically alone; it can also include unique, transcendental experiences. The next section presents the perceptions of the participants concerning the relationship between religion and spirituality.

7.3 The relationship between religion and spirituality

Although religion and spirituality have been described by the participants of this study in various ways, according to their personal understanding, all the definitions fall within the framework of beliefs and institutional, personal, and functional aspects of the constructs. Out of the 27 interviews conducted for this study, 15 of the participants claimed that there is a distinction between religion and spirituality, while 12 said that religion and spirituality are related or interrelated, or else could not pinpoint the specific difference between the two constructs. Below are sample extracts from those who observed a distinction between religion and spirituality.

7.3.1 Religion as distinct from spirituality

The participants who distinguished between religion and spirituality argued that religion is different from spirituality because the former relates to collective worship or corporate beliefs, while the latter is more of a personal matter. According to Amos (15), "spirituality is more of a personal thing, but religion is collective; like a group of people doing something or worshipping." Meanwhile, Precious (14) thought, "Religion is like a group of people [coming together] but spirituality is just you yourself, getting closer to God." In addition, Anthony (13) claimed that "religion is when a lot of people believe in something, [and] spirituality is when someone, just one person really, really believes in God." In agreement with the above statements, Lucy (13) maintained that it is possible for people to be religious but not spiritual, by saying:

> I think that you can say that you are part of a religion, but not necessarily be spiritual. In the sense that I feel there are lots of people that go to church, but they don't necessarily have a relationship with God. You know they say that being religious is a label, so Christianity is a label. Erm, in the same way I think being a Christian is different from being a born again believer. I think that being religious is different from being spiritual.

Meanwhile Lucy argued that, to be considered spiritual, one needs to be born again. And because Lucy thought that there are many people in the church that are not born again, she would not consider them to be spiritual. However, Mercy (13) claimed that religion is an external act while spirituality is part of someone's life, an attitude developed over many years. She said, "I think religion is something that is not really part of you, is not your lifestyle; [it] is something that you need to do, maybe, just because you are there or something. Spirituality is part of you and is like a lifestyle that you've acquired for many years."

In another interview, Rejoice (13) posited that religion relates to beliefs while spirituality is demonstrated through one's behaviour and conduct. She declared that it is possible for people

to claim passively to have a belief, but spirituality must be actively demonstrated for other people to see. According to Rejoice:

> I think the difference [between religion and spirituality] is between the belief and the way you conduct yourself. They are quite different because you can say you believe in something and then the way you conduct yourself does not allow people to see that in you, or does not allow people to say that it's true, he [or she] really believes in God. So, I think conducting yourself will allow people to see if you actually have faith in God or not.

Additionally, Oscar (13) said, "I think religion is different. I think religion is a belief that you have but spirituality comes after religion. So like now you have a religion, for example, Christianity; spirituality comes after that. Like you have a spiritual relationship with God." The findings from this study show that the participants perceived spirituality as an active part of religion, even though it is still personal. It is through spiritual demonstration that both fellow believers and others evaluate the religiousness of a believer. The next section presents the findings relating to the participants who believe that religion and spirituality are interrelated.

7.3.2 Religion and spirituality as interconnected

The participants who claimed that religion and spirituality are interrelated maintained that there is no clear distinction between the two constructs. Below are several representative extracts of this claim.

Grace (15) said:

> I think spirituality is tied into religion, that you are spiritual because of your religion, like, for the Christian religion, when you accept Christ, you have the Holy Spirit in you. That is what makes you spiritual. I know some people believe spirituality as its own, believing in the universe and stuff, but that is not what I believe.

According to Grace, spirituality is demonstrated through religion. It comes as a result of the acceptance of Jesus Christ and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. She also asserted that spirituality is manifested through the fruits of the Holy Spirit, which include "love, peace, patience, self-control" and a personal commitment to reading the Bible and praying. Grace

further demonstrated her knowledge of other types of spirituality outside the framework of religion, which some people espouse today. This type of spirituality is what is referred to as the new spiritual movement (Willson, 2010).

According to Zinnbauer *et al*. (1997), this movement became popular in the 20th century as a result of many people choosing to identify themselves as spiritual but not religious due to their loss of confidence in the church leadership or church ethos. Willson (2010) found that this movement has become popular in Western countries, including the United States of America, Australia and New Zealand (Brodin, 2003; Shimazono, 1999). It is also possible that this movement has followers in the United Kingdom, although it might not have become as popular as in the other countries mentioned above. Timothy and Conover (2006) declared that this movement "stresses the sanctity of nature, harmony of the cosmos, resurrection of ancient spiritual traditions, and self-improvement in the realms of spirit, mind and body" (p. 138).
The movement's followers come from different backgrounds and engage in a variety of activities, such as "spirituality, metaphysics, yoga, natural healing, Herbology and communion with nature" (Cogswell, 1996, p. 80). Although Grace stated that she was not speaking of this type of spirituality, the fact that she was aware of it indicates that there is a tendency towards this type of spirituality becoming popular among teenagers in the United Kingdom. Georgina (15) stressed that spirituality should be the determinant of religiosity. According to her, "I think your religion is based on your spirituality. I guess they interrelate with each other because your religion is based on your spirit. So [it] is like, your spirit will help you become more devoted to religion. I think they are both connected together."

The focus of this section, however, is not to debate which comes precedes the other, religion or spirituality, but to examine the connection between them. Grace, Georgina and many other

participants made it clear that this connection exists. In fact, in the minds of many participants, like Goodness (15), the connection is so strong that it is difficult to see any difference at all between religion and spirituality. In his effort to distinguish between the two, he said, "There is not much difference, to be fair. Because, for religion, it is something that you believe in, that you have not really seen but you believe is there. Yeah, so there is no difference." Another participant, Goodness (15), said,

> "I think they [religion and spirituality] are kind of the same thing. You are like going to church every day and you are always close to God. So, there is no difference between them."

The participants in this present study acknowledged that there is a relationship between religion and spirituality, although the majority were able to identify differences between the two concepts as well. They stated that their respective features interconnect in some ways. Some of the participants struggled to even identify any difference between religion and spirituality, as they claimed that one construct leads to the other, and hence, should not be separated. Those who claimed that there is a distinction between religion and spirituality stated that the former is characterised by collective or corporate worship while the latter is more of personal belief. They also claimed that it is possible for someone to belong to a religious community, like a church, but not experience a personal relationship with Jesus, which, in their view, is the essence of spirituality. Furthermore, they claimed that religion is an external activity while spirituality is more about the internal state of mind, an attitude developed over a period of time. In addition, they maintained that religion relates to beliefs, while spirituality relates to behaviour and conduct. Similarly, they stated that spirituality is a by-product of religion. In other words, religion is like a catalyst that brings out spirituality in a person.

The participants of this study, by and large, perceived spirituality as an active part of religion, even though it is still personal. It is through spiritual demonstration that the religiousness of a

believer is evaluated by both believers and non-believers. They argued that the extent of one's religiosity is measurable by the extent of the spirituality shown by that person, because in the view of these participants, it is through your spirituality that you show the world how deeply immersed you are in your religion. Meanwhile, those who argued that religion and spirituality are interconnected stated that there is no distinctive difference between the two constructs because they tie into one another. They maintained that there is no difference between the two because the reason for going to church, for example, is to get closer to God or to have a personal encounter with God, and thus makes a person spiritual.

The findings of this study accord with previous studies regarding the relationship between religion and spirituality. The literature review has shown that scholars have not been able to completely differentiate religion from spirituality because of their common features and the interconnectedness of their various elements (Hill *et al*., 2000; Zinnbauer *et al*., 1997; Zinnbauer, Pargament, & Scott, 1999; Zinnbauer & Pargament, 2013), although they claimed there are some differences between the two. Other researchers have attempted to separate spirituality from religion, claiming that the two constructs are different (Hardy, 1979; Timothy & Conover, 2006; Argyle *et al*., 1975; McIntyre, 1988), based on variations in their features. However, the notion of religion and spirituality as distinct and separable has not taken hold, and many scholars still define them as interconnected (Pargament, 1999). Zinnbauer and Pargament (2013) argue that defining religion as completely different from spirituality results in the polarization of both. This division is regarded as unnecessary because, for example, if religion is only defined in terms of the sacred, it diminishes its functional features. Also, if spirituality is only defined as a personal relationship to the sacred, it ignores the cultural contexts in which it occurs as well as its functions in the society (Hood, 2003). Arguably, both

religion and spirituality have sacred substance, and in most cases, spirituality is expressed in religion (Pargament, 1999; Zinnbauer *et al*., 1997).

Furthermore, it has been argued that religion is more than beliefs and spirituality is more than a relationship. Both religion and spirituality arguably can take place in traditional or non-traditional settings, they both involve processes of searching, and they are both dynamic and multidimensional. Hill *et al*. (2000) argue that describing religion and spirituality only through their dissimilarities is to overlook a robust, rich and dynamic interaction between the two constructs. Hence, the present study concurs with previous researchers who have studied spirituality within the framework of religion (Bridger, 2001; Zinnbauer *et al*., 1997).

Therefore, as declared in chapter 2, the religion and spirituality of the participants of this study have been examined as multi-dimensional constructs involving the personal relationships that the participants have with God, as demonstrated through their beliefs and practices, behaviours, church attendance, and involvement in other Christian spirituality-enhancing programmes and services, both within and outside traditional church institutions. The next section presents the findings on, and discusses, the effects of religion and spirituality on the participants of this study.

7.4 Influence of religion and spirituality

Despite the different definitions assigned to religion and spirituality by the participants, they all agree that both have affected their lives in different ways. The participants claimed that religion and spirituality have influenced them in terms of decision-making, the words they say, the music they listen to, and the actions they take. They also maintained that religion and

spirituality make them stand out amongst the crowd and give them access to God. Below are a few examples of how the participants claimed that religion and spirituality influence them.

Joy (13) said:

> Oh! Religion and spirituality have definitely influenced me to [know] what I should and shouldn't do, 'cause what others might think is acceptable, I would think not, like certain types of music, certain types of words; like where I would go, what I would do, etc.

Jane (15), in her comments, claimed that religion and spirituality:

> Help me not [to] take some decisions that other people took. Say, for example, erm, like there is one time that most of the people will be like, 'oh, let's go and take food from the school canteen without pay[ing].' I will be like, 'No! That is wrong', because you have some instinct in you that stops you from doing that. They also help me to be aware of myself and everything around me, and not letting go without saying anything. It's like no, and you can like connect to things more… I think they also give me purpose in life.

Meanwhile, Natalia (15) said:

> They [religion and spirituality] make me unique. Like some of my friends, they are Christians, but they don't really know who they are. They don't show that they are actually Christian(s), say like, on Sundays they go to church, but in school, there is something else going on. Like they are different people, yeah. But religion and spirituality make me stand out from other people.

Furthermore, Angie (13) described how her religion and spirituality affect her perceptions. She stated: "They change your opinion; like if I wasn't a Christian, I would have had a different opinion.*"* The perception about the influence of religion and spirituality held by the above participants is consistent with Francis (2001) and Furrow, King and White (2004), who claim that religion and spirituality affect the moral and social conduct of teenagers by giving them clear sense of meaning and perception of life.

Georgina (15) feels that religion and spirituality offer her certain advantages that her non-religious peers lack. According to her: "Erm, they motivated me to do [make] like, the right decisions, which later on gave me opportunities and advantages better than other people in my class and stuff." When asked to clarify these advantages, Georgina stated that she has been

getting higher grades in all her subjects, which would have been difficult without her relationship to religion and spirituality. The influence of religion and spirituality on academic performance, as described by Georgina, is in agreement with the claim made by Francis (2001) and Park (2001) that the religion and spirituality of teenagers play a positive role on their perceptions about school and their academic achievement. This because teenagers who attend church regularly will also feel happy and positive about school, including the teachers and the subjects they are taking. Johnson (2008), in agreement with Regnerus and Elder (2003), also claimed that teenagers in 16 of the 18 scholarly articles reviewed, maintained that religion and spirituality are amongst the factors that contributed to their academic achievement. As the findings in Roof's (1999) study demonstrated, the present participants claimed that submitting to the will of God through personal worship and obedience to the commandments of God gives their lives meaning. The next section summaries the salient points from the chapter.

7.5 Chapter summary

This chapter has reported the findings on how the participants of this study make sense of their religion and spirituality. Specifically, these findings covered the emergent theme of the way the participants of this study perceived religion and spirituality. This chapter has shown that the individual meanings that each of the participants ascribe to religion and spirituality are very important, as they affect the way the participants experience religion and spirituality. The chapter also demonstrated that the diversity of meanings of religion and spirituality, as given by the participants, is consistent with previous research in this field. Previous studies have emphasised that one of the key issues in any investigation of religion and spirituality is the definition of the two constructs. This chapter discussed the participants' definitions of the constructs in relation to extant scholarly work. The chapter also explained how it was not easy for the participants to separate religion and spirituality in terms of their functions, because some

of the definitions that the participants gave for religion overlapped with that of spirituality. In any case, both are important to the participants, despite their inability to define the constructs separately. The next chapter explores the theme of church attendance.

Chapter Eight: The Perceptions of Church Attendance

8.0 Chapter introduction

The aim of this chapter is twofold: to present the findings on the perceptions of church attendance among the participants in this study, and to discuss these findings in relation to the extant literature. Within the discourse on the religion and spirituality of teenagers, there is an assumption that only a tiny percentage of the British population, including teenagers, attends church regularly. This has fuelled the widespread belief that the British populace, including teenagers, are not religious (Ashworth & Farthing, 2007; Brierley, 2005; Cusack, 2011; Perman, 1977). This present study confirms that, in fact, a large percentage of teenagers in the RCCG, the context of this study, attend church regularly. This chapter is divided into two main sections. The first section presents the perception of church attendance by the participants, while the second discusses the reasons the participants attend church on a regular basis, even though a general decline in church attendance among teenagers in the UK has been reported.

8.1 The perceptions of church attendance

As mentioned in the sampling section, all of the participants of this study are regular members of the Redeemed Christian Church of God, attending church programmes (these include youth groups, prayer meetings, Bible studies, night vigils, church organised outreach, and charity programmes) at least once a week. The interviews with the participants revealed that some of them are more regular in their church attendance than others. For example, while some participants, like Grace (15) and Joy (13), attend church services at least three times a week, others, like Georgina (15) and Moses (15), attend church services once a week in most cases. The interview report shows that while some participants attend church programmes more than three times a week, a few also attend only once a week, except on special occasions when they are not available. When the participants were asked how they perceive the attendance of church

programmes, they all declared that church attendance is an important aspect of their lives because they have all been brought up in the Church community.

A number of previous studies (Bruce, 2002; Cusack, 2011; Davie, 1994; Day, 2010; Hay & Nye, 2006; Kay & Francis, 1996; Perman, 1977) have reported a consistent decline in church attendance in Britain since 1972, whereby fewer people, including teenagers, attend church services every year. Arguably, churches in Britain are becoming empty because the majority are not engaging with religion as they did in the past; and teenagers have deserted the religion of their parents in favour of the alternatives that contemporary society provides. Nevertheless, the findings in this study demonstrate that black teenagers, in particular those who participated in this study, spend a considerable amount of time attending church services and church related programmes both on and off church premises. The present findings are consistent with Francis (2001) and Singleton, Mason, and Webber (2004), who argue that despite the overall decline in church attendance, some teenagers are still interested in religion, and many actively engage with both religion and spirituality, although in a way that is different from their parents, as many do not regularly attend church services. They argue that many contemporary teenagers now engage with religion and spirituality in more personalized and private ways, an occurrence described by Davie (1994) as "believing without belonging." Francis (1994), as cited in Francis (2001), argues that the lack of church attendance should not be equated with lack of belonging, because it is possible for someone to be an affiliate of a church but not a regular attendant. Francis described the non-attendance of church by many church affiliated people, including teenagers, in Britain as "believing without practicing."

However, the findings in this present study show that the participants are not only interested in religion and spirituality, but also attend church regularly. Arguably, the participants could be

regarded as both believing and practicing Christians. The findings show that the majority of the participants attend church programmes up to three or four times a week, with many taking part in different church activities. The interest that the participants showed through church attendance and the amount of time they spent on church activities seemed to contrast the previous claim made by Cusack (2011), that teenagers are no longer interested in going to church.

The reports of regular attendance, as recorded in this present study, are consistent with Burgess (2011) and Hunt (2002), who showed that black people in Britain, including teenagers, tend to attend church regularly (Kim & Esquivel, 2011). Arguably, the regular church attendance of teenagers in the black majority churches, particularly the RCCG, has contributed to the rapid expansion of the church, as described in chapter 5 of this study. Hence, the assumption that teenagers in the UK have abandoned their faith cannot be said to be a general occurrence since it is not true for black teenagers, such as the participants of this study. In fact, it could be said that while other churches, namely the mainstream churches, are experiencing declines in attendance, the black majority churches, including the RCCG, are experiencing rapid growth as a result of the attendance of church by their youngsters (Burgess, Knibbe, & Quaas, 2010; Hunt, 2002; Hunt & Lightly, 2001). Although all the participants acknowledged that church attendance means a lot to them, when they were questioned further on the reason for their attendance of church programmes, their responses varied. These responses have been grouped into three categories. These are discussed in the next section of this chapter.

8.2 Reasons for church attendance among the participants

As stated in the preceding section, the participants in this study claimed to be regular church attendees but for a variety of reasons. This is in agreement with the claim of Burgess (2011),

that there are several reasons that black people in the UK attend church on a regular basis. The study's findings show that the reasons for church attendance among the participants fall into these three categories: the desire to learn about God and find fellowship with other believers; the support that the church provides; and the desire to please their parents.

8.2.1 To learn from God and for fellowship with other believers

Grace is a 15-year-old female teenager in one of the RCCG churches in Leicester. She claimed that she attends Church services on a regular basis, at least three times a week. Grace is a member of the Church choir, an active member of the Sunday school department and a regular attendant at the workers' meetings of the Church. Grace also claimed she attends the prayer meetings set up by the church every week and the Church night vigils, once a month. In addition to this, Grace attends Bible studies courses, and she has been privileged to teach in front of the whole parishioners during one of the Bible studies, as well as lead the programmes during the Sunday school and prayer meetings. Grace specified that there are many reasons why she attends church services on a regular basis. These reasons include the encouragement received from the Word of God, fellowship with other believers, and the role models and mentorship provided by the church. According to Grace:

> Church (attendance) is important because you need a fellowship so that you will be encouraged in the Word; so that you will have a deeper understanding of the things you will not be able to understand by yourself; and so you can be touched by the lives of others. So, you are not just running the race alone, you have people that you can lean on. You can also have a Mentor in the church, who can support you, who can help you.

In agreement with Grace, Zoe (15) declared, "I think church is really important to go to, because you learn things that you've never thought of before, and you can share your opinion as well." Meanwhile, Natalia stated that: "I come to church to worship God. Know him for myself, just give him worship, for He actually deserves it, and He is my personal saviour.

Additionally, Oscar (13) said:

> I think it's pretty important [to attend church services] because you're interacting with God's people, like your brothers and sisters. I think it also helps you build your relationship with God, like things you might not even know, you'll get to know.

To the above participants and those who share their views on church attendance, it is important to attend church services because they provide an opportunity for them to learn from other people, including their peers. Oscar stated that this fellowship allows him to interact with other people as 'brothers and sisters'. It is no wonder, then, that some people refer to church as a community. Additionally, these participants declared that the church programmes provide a space for the sharing of opinions, thereby providing an opportunity for mentoring, both in the spiritual and mundane. Georgina (15) added:

> I always enjoy church, especially children's church because, like, in children's church, erm, they kind of teach you what the adults are teaching [learning], but they simplify it for your own understanding. And then, because we are in a small group, I'm able to personally meet the teacher and ask questions, and then, they will give me a full explanation, which does help me.

Meanwhile, Rejoice (13) admitted that "I think coming to church is quite fun, especially when the preaching is good, it makes you want to come every week." From Rejoice's perspective, 'good preaching' results in more people attending church services. The only problem with this is, it is difficult to quantify 'good preaching' because what one person considers to be 'good preaching' may not appeal to another. However, looking at 'good preaching' from the perspective of the speaker, I assume she was speaking of preaching that is relevant and relatable to teenagers. More specifically, it could mean preaching in which teenagers' worldviews and perceptions are taken into consideration rather than adult-oriented, structured preaching, where, as one of the participants put it, "everything is centred on careers, monies and healings" (Jane, 13). Jane claimed that she does not need such a sermon or emphasis; rather, she wanted a church where issues that are bothering teenagers, such as 'academic success, relationships, and spiritual growth', are prioritised. Georgina (15) added that her frequent attendance of church services helped her to strengthen her relationship with God and not to take God's

goodness for granted. Furthermore, Georgina expressed the view that if she wavers in the service of God, there is a tendency for God to withdraw His support from her. She commented:

> Well, obviously, I've been going to the Church since I was little… 'cause I want to strengthen my relationship with God, be able to talk to him and stuff. I fear Him. I don't want to stop going [to the Church] because He's done so much for me; so, I guess I need to keep going and thanking Him. I don't want to take Him for granted. If I stop going [to the Church], then I don't know what could happen, anything could happen.

Georgina's remark concerning the possibility of God not doing 'so much' for her if she were to stop going to church could indicate that it is possible for teenagers to serve God out of fear rather than out of love. This seems to be a new line of inquiry, which is beyond the scope of this research. I hope that new research could be carried out in the future on the perception of black teenagers in the Pentecostal Churches regarding the relationship between church attendance and the blessings of God.

8.2.2 The support that the Church provides

In addition to the notion that the church serves as an avenue for fellowship and learning the Word of God, some participants also stated that it provided them with spiritual and moral support. Contrary to reports in some studies, such as Burgess (2009, 2010), that one of the main reasons for the rapid growth of black majority churches in Britain is their provision of material support to their members, in particular adults; none of the participants in this study mentioned material support, either directly to them or indirectly through their family members, as their reason for attending church services.

However, some participants reported that they have benefitted from social, moral, and spiritual types of support from the church. For example, when 13 year old Florence was questioned about the reason for her church attendance, her response was: "Erm, I will say my relationship with God and things that I need help with, like when I need help with a difficult situation, I

have people in the church that I can rely on to speak with." Meanwhile, Rejoice (13) added that mature people in the church "help me in my spiritual growth."

The participants' claim that they attend church programmes because of the support they receive there is consistent with previous studies' findings (Burgess, 2009; 2011; Gerfoff, 1992; Hunt, 2002). These earlier research findings postulated that one of the main reasons why the black majority churches in England, particularly the RCCG, experienced rapid growth in the UK was the support and shelter that it provides for its members. The forms this support takes can include social, economic, emotional and sometimes financial. Hunt (2002) maintained that as a result of the active role that the RCCG plays in supporting its members, some people regard it as a denomination for finding "shelter, psychological security and solidarity" (p. 152).

Notably, this study has not been able to verify any of the claims of Burgess (2009; 2011), that black people attend church services in order to release tension as a result of unemployment or underemployment, job insecurity, financial difficulties, and racial discrimination or because of financial support they receive from the church. This could be, firstly, because the interview participants are still minors under the guardianship of their parents, and hence have experienced neither under or unemployment nor job insecurity, which could drive them to seek church support. Secondly, they are all secondary students, and hence are not directly involved with any financial difficulties their families might be facing. Even though it could be argued that family structure, in terms of parents' job security and family financial stability, could play a role in the church attendance of the teenagers, none of them raised this topic during the interviews.

However, evidence abounds in the data that they receive moral, spiritual and social support. This support is disseminated through the provision of a variety of age-appropriate programmes for teenagers, such as Bible club, youth fellowship, youth and children's week, and concerts, organised by the youth departments in each parish or jointly by all the RCCG parishes in Leicester. Some of the parishes also offer some programmes that involve the whole congregation, but in which the youth are allowed to play key roles, such as street fairs, a programme organised biannually by one of the parishes, where all the church members go out into the community to share the Gospel of Christ. Shiloh hour is another programme organised by one of the RCCG Parishes wherein youth are entrusted with the primary responsibilities. They are involved in the organisation and execution of the programme. Arguably, these programmes are very useful in preparing the youth for academic endeavours and future careers, as they build their self-confidence, socialise, connect with the Biblical teachings and pray, and, in some cases, manage finances, as these are all essential steps during the preparation stages.

It is also possible to infer that church is a perfect place for the study's teenagers to unwind. The participants claimed they enjoy fellowship with other believers and learn new ways of coping with pressure in the society, especially given the stress that comes with school activities, the home lives of black teenagers in Britain, pressure from peers and society, and the transitional period of adolescence. Additionally, Francis (2001, 2013) and Singleton, Mason, and Webber (2004) have shown that church attendance plays a key role in the lives of teenagers, as they are able to understand certain concepts that are taught in the church and apply these teachings in their everyday lives. The next section presents and discusses extracts from the interviews with those who said they attend church services to please their parents.

8.2.3 Because of the parents

Although it may not be explicitly stated in the extant literature that parents have an influence on teenagers' church attendance, as the interview participants in this study claimed, studies have shown that parents and extended family members play a tangible role in the religion and spirituality of teenagers (Forman, 2001; Sartaj & Aslam, 2010). The findings revealed that some of the interview participants attend church services due to the influence of their parents. For example, Joseph (14) declared that the main reason he attends church services is because of his parents, although he also loves going to church for fun. According to him, "Erm, it is my parents [that make me attend church] because if they weren't going, I don't think I will be going." Meanwhile, Matthew (14) claimed that if his parents were not members of the church and did not attend regularly, he would prefer to go out with his friends. He commented: "Well, I'm quite a young person. So, [it] is because of my parents [that I attend church services]. I wouldn't like to go out with my friends now, mainly because my parents come to church."

When Matthew was asked further if he thinks he will continue to attend church after he moves out from his parents' house, he said he would only attend church programmes when he did not have more important things to do. According to Matthew, "If I didn't have anything to do or like nothing important to do, then I can come to church. But, when I have football, because I play for Leicester City Academy, I won't go to church." Matthew's response is a clear indication of how teenagers prioritise and what they consider important and less important. As shown in his response, attending a football game is more important than coming to church. In such a case, it can be inferred that church is attended only to please the parents. Nevertheless, he said that when he does attend, he enjoys the service. Another participant that spoke about the influence of her parents on church attendance is Lucy, who stated that: "Erm, I think a lot

of it [church attendance] is influenced by my mum going all the time. You know, I accompany her everywhere she goes." Additionally, Zoe (15) declared that:

> Well, my parents tell me to go to church because they know is important for me to go to church. But when I come to the church, I learn new things and once I learn a new thing at the church, I go home and discuss with my dad and my sister, we have like, a debate on the topic that we did in church.

Finally, this study shows that another factor contributing to the regular church attendance of the participants is their parents' church attendance. As Bridges and Moore (2002) argue, "parent's own religiosity may influence children's developing religiosity and spirituality" (p.24), including church attendance, because there is a demonstrated positive link between religion and volunteering in adults (Sherkat & Ellison, 1999). Numerous studies have shown that there is a strong relationship between the religion and spirituality, church attendance, and religious participation of parents and their children (Bao *et al*., 1999). Arguably, children are more likely to follow the behaviours of their parents under certain conditions, and religion is one of those conditions, because parents play a key role in the religion and spirituality of their teenage children.

Bader and Desmond (2006), Myers (1996) and Gniewosv and Noack (2012) show that it is easy for parents to pass religious beliefs on to the next generation when they belong to the same religious circle and regularly attend the same place of worship, because in this way, parents provide a consistent and strong foundation for their children's religious beliefs. Arguably, children imitate and model the behaviours of their parents (Bisin *et al*., 2004), and their beliefs and behaviours could also be influenced by the religion of their parents. Bao, Whitbeck, Hoyt and Conger (1999) argued that children copy the beliefs and behaviours of those around them, such as parents and siblings, through modelling and observation.

Furthermore, it is argued that family structure may influence the amount of certainty the teenagers have in their religious beliefs (Hunsberger, Pratt, & Pancer, 2002; Pargament, 1999). For instance, Bao *et al*. (1999) and Cashmore and Goodnow (1985) showed that caregivers and parents are in a good position to shape the religion and spirituality of their children, as the children follow in their steps on a daily basis. Arguably, there is a relationship between the religion and spirituality, church attendance, and religious performance of the parents and children, including young teenagers like the present participants, because they are still under the tutelage of their parents (Gunnoe, Hetherington, & Reiss, 1999). This is consistent with Benson, Donahue, & Erickson (1989) and Sherkat and Ellison (1999), who found that the religion and spirituality of teenagers are promoted through participation in religious activities at home, where the relationship with their parents is loving, caring and supportive, and where the parents provide clear messages about religious beliefs and practices. This could also be true of teenagers whose parents regularly attend church programmes, because these teenagers can model their parents' religious involvement (King & Mueller, 2003).

However, studies have also confirmed that parenting style has a significant effect on the behaviour of children (Davies, Cummings, & Winter, 2004), including the way they relate to religion and spirituality. Some parents coerce their children into becoming integrated into the family through forceful maturity demands, supervision and the strict discipline of any child who disobeys (Baumrind, 1991). In particular, African parents tend to impose their religious beliefs on their children without allowing their children to make a decision on their own (Sartaj & Aslam, 2010). Although there is no evidence of parental imposition of religious beliefs among the present research participants, this topic could open up a new area of debate in the near future, especially among black parents in the UK, as they are typically considered to be strict disciplinarians who demand compliance from their children.

Despite the fact that all the participants are in agreement that church attendance plays a positive role in their lives, a few of them, like Jane, maintained that church denomination does not matter to them. According to Jane (13):

> I think it doesn't matter what kind of church you go to. It's just, erm, takes you away from home where you can get distracted. It's a place where people can have personal time with God, and like, you can learn things from people that are more dedicated to God; like they have more wisdom about it.

Similarly, Grace (15) added that an individual's personal relationship with God should be cherished more than the attendance of church programmes. Nevertheless, she concurred that church attendance is also important because it meets attendees' need for fellowship and encouragement, which could bring about a deeper understanding, and allows them to enjoy the privilege of belonging to a Christian community. This is how Grace described her perception of church attendance:

> I think as long as you have a relationship with God, that is primarily what matters, but church is important also because you need a fellowship so that you will be encouraged in the word, so that you will have a deeper understanding of the things you will not be able to understand by yourself and so that you can be touched by the lives of others. So, you are not just running the race alone, you have people that you can lean on. You can have a mentor in the church, who can support you, who can help you.

Additionally, the participants agreed that church should not be perceived as just a place of worship for believers, or where only believers could receive support, but it should also serve as a place where everyone is welcomed, including sinners, repented sinners, and believers. It should also be a place of teaching and evangelism, so sinners could repent of their sins and come to faith.

This is how Lucy (13) explained her view of church attendance:

> I think [it] is a place, I don't know, but someone once told me that church is a place not for the well, but for the sick. I think [it] is a place, I don't know how to say it, that when you go out to evangelise, where you will bring people to teach them about God. So, inasmuch as it's for yourself, I think a lot of us forget that church isn't just a place for Christians, it's not just a place for believers. It's very much a place for everybody.

The above accounts indicate that the participants hold the attendance of church services in high esteem. Many of these teenagers follow their parents to church programmes while some of them are also volunteers in the church, serving as ushers, choristers, media personnel, protocol officers, and so on. Although the church leadership has not made it compulsory for teenagers to attend all of the midweek church programmes, such as Bible study, prayer meetings, departmental meetings and so on, it is expected that all of the volunteers in the church attend at least one midweek programme, in addition to the regular attendance of Sunday programmes. Meanwhile, many parents are volunteers and regularly bring their children to all the programmes, apart from those teenagers who are volunteers themselves. This explains why the majority of these teenagers attend church services on a regular basis, up to three or four times a week. It could be argued that the regular church attendance of the parents plays a part in how often the participants attend church services. However, many of these teenagers declared that they will still continue to go to church after they leave their parents' homes, because church attendance has become part of their lifestyle.

Despite the divergent reasons proffered by the participants of this study as to why they attend church services, they are all united in claiming that church attendance plays a positive role in their lives. These roles are discussed further under the section on the influence of social contexts in chapter 11 of this study.

8.3 Chapter summary

This chapter has discussed church attendance and its importance to the study's participants, which they demonstrated through their regular attendance and participation in church related programmes, both on and off church premises. This is consistent with Singleton, Mason, and Webber (2004), Francis (2001, 2013), and Dandelion and Collins-Mayo (2010), who all found

that teenagers engage more in religion and spirituality than young children. It is evident in this chapter that teenagers still hold on to religion and can be considered spiritual, even though the absolute number of those who attend regularly may be less than in previous generations. Additionally, this chapter has argued that there are variety of reasons why the present participants attend church services. The next chapter discusses the findings on the religious experiences of the participants in this study.

Chapter Nine: Religious and Spiritual Beliefs

9.0 Chapter introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to discuss the findings on the religious and spiritual beliefs of the participants. This chapter is important because of scholarly debates that it is difficult to ascertain when children's religious beliefs become theirs. In other words, scholars have argued that many children, including teenagers, depend on the religious and spiritual beliefs of their parents, and it is not easy to differentiate when the beliefs become theirs. In addition, it has been argued that there are different types of beliefs regarding religion and spirituality. Day (2010) argued that religious and spiritual beliefs can be categorised into two headings, namely, the propositional statement, and a faith statement. Under the first category, Day argues that it is possible for some people to believe in the existence of God, but this belief has no impact on their lives. Meanwhile, the latter refers to a practical faith or belief in God, which leads to a change in the life of the adherent. Cornelio (2015) shows that, following the first category, it is possible for young people to have a belief, or be open to the possibility of belief, that a God of some sort or a supernatural being exists, as a result of religious ideas they are exposed to, either amongst their families or at school. This type of religious belief is just a matter of opinion, as it does not lead to conviction. Meanwhile, under the second category, it is reported that believers exercise their belief in God, which results in a change of actions and attitudes.

Although belief may mean many things to many people, as described by Day (2010) above, this study reveals that the type of belief that is described by the participants is the faith-based form of belief which leads to practical actions. Arguably, this belief influences the way they relate with religion and spirituality and shapes their lives in general. The findings reveal that the participants' belief influences their lives, particularly their decisions, values and relationships. It also influences the way they think and react to situations, including unpleasant

experiences. These findings are consistent with other existing literature, which claims that religious beliefs have a great influence on the thinking and behaviour of teenagers as well as on how they make meaning of life's experiences (Francis, 2001, 2013; Procter, 2011; Smith & Denton, 2005).

Arguably, the findings discussed in this study fit the second category of Day (2010), demonstrating that a practical faith or belief in God often leads to a believer's change of life. The description of this belief is consistent with Ruel (1982), who argued that the faith-based belief form may reflect a return to a relational sense of belief, where an individual cultivates a personal relationship with God. This is also in agreement with Chryssides and Geaves's (2007) study, which establishes that religious belief is deeper than having a rational awareness of God; rather, it is a belief, which drives the believer to action. In most cases, this action requires a drastic change of behaviour and attitude.

However, the findings on beliefs about God in this study contradict those propagated by the participants in Smith (2010), even though Smith's participants also believe in the existence of God who created the heavens, the earth, and everything that is in it. Smith (2010) argues that the religion of American teenagers, in particular, the participants in his study, could be referred to as "a moralistic therapeutic deism." This designation refers to the belief in "a God who created and orders the world, watching over human life on earth" (Smith, 2010, p. 41). The participants in Smith's study claimed that "this God wants people to be good, nice, and fair to each other, but does not need to be particularly involved with their lives, except when he is needed to resolve a problem" (Smith, 2010). To this God, feeling good about oneself and being happy is the fundamental principle in life. Consequentially, anyone who is able to abide by these principles will go to Heaven when they die.

Smith argues that this doctrine forms a fundamental belief among principal "Protestant and Catholic youth, [and is] also...visible among black and conservative Protestants, Jewish teens, and other religious types of teenagers and even many 'non-religious' teenagers in the USA" (Smith, 2010). However, the findings in this study, though sharing some features of the above beliefs about God, such as his being the creator and the sustainer of the world, the loving and just God, the awesome and indescribable God, differ in some senses from Smith's. For example, the findings show that the black teenagers in the UK, in particular, the present participants, perceive God as the creator of heaven and earth, an awesome and loving God, and also a just and Holy God, who is interested in every aspect of people's lives and likes to be involved in people's daily living. This God is also perceived as one who listens and answers the prayers offered to Him in faith because He desires to connect with people on an individual basis.

Acknowledging that there are many beliefs that Christian teenagers might have, the religious and the spiritual beliefs in this study relate to the beliefs that the participants hold about God, death and life after death, especially Hell and Heaven. Although Dandelion and Collins-Mayo (2010) argued that there is a relocation of belief among young people today "from the transcendental and spatial to the mundane and temporal" (p. 103), this study reveals that many of the participants still professed their belief in the transcendental, in line with the legitimised and sanctioned tradition of their church (RCCG) leaders. It is revealed that the beliefs of the participants serve as the backbone of their religious experience and practice. However, the extent to which these beliefs influence the religious and spiritual lives of the participants varies. Furthermore, not all the participants shared the same belief in what happens after this life. The next section discusses the interview extracts and extant literature on beliefs about God.

9.1 Beliefs about God

All the participants in this study espoused belief in God, although their descriptions of Him varied from one to another. For example, some participants described God as a personal being, the creator of everything in the world and above the world; one who works miracles; and one who is beyond description because of His awesomeness, without whom nothing would exist. Others described Him as a powerful, awe-inspiring creator God, who is separate from His creation, and who put humans in the world in order to test their obedience or disobedience. According to these participants, people who obey God will go to Heaven, while those who disobey Him will be sent to eternal damnation. Below are some extracts exemplifying the way the participants described their beliefs.

> God is the creator of everything and we are put here to worship him! And like, basically, it's all down to three words, if you want to live your life the way God does not want, then you would face the consequences or you can be devoted to God by not be[ing] part of this world, this will be for a greater purpose at the end. (Jane, 15)

Meanwhile, Natalia (15) described God as great and mighty and one who does incredible things for those who believe in Him. This is how she put it:

> I believe that He is a miracle worker, I believe He's the King of kings, the Lord of lords, and He created the world. Erm, I feel there is nothing above Him, like I don't even know; He's just like something you can't even describe, like, He is just God! Indescribable!

Additionally, Rejoice (13) asserted that God is the reason for her living. According to her, "I will say that He [God] is the reason why I'm here; that without Him I wouldn't be here. Erm, I will say that He is the most power[ful] person ever."

The description of God as given by this study's participants is consistent with extant literature on the subject matter. Smith and Denton (2005) and Smith and Snell (2009) show that religious beliefs, including the belief about God, are paramount in adolescents' lives. This is because it is difficult to follow someone or something without first believing in such. Cornelio (2015)

argues that there may be different types of beliefs; for example, a young person has a belief that a God of some sort or a supernatural being exists, as a result of religious ideas they are exposed to, either amongst their families or at school, but lack any connection with what is believed. However, the type of belief that the participants claimed they have in God is deeper than mere rational awareness (Chryssides & Geaves, 2007). Rather, it is a belief, which drives the believer to action. In most cases, this action requires a drastic change of behaviour and attitude. The study shows that the belief in God influences the lives of the participants, particularly their decisions, values and relationships. It also influences the way they think and react to situations, including unpleasant situations. The findings in this study are consistent with other existing literature, which claims that religious beliefs (beliefs in the supernatural) have a great influence on teenagers' thinking and behaviour and on how they make sense of life's experiences (Francis, 2001, 2013; Procter, 2011; Smith & Denton, 2005).

This study shows that the belief in God that the participants hold compels them to commit themselves to living a life devoted to God. This is consistent with Vincett *et al*.'s (2012) argument that being a Christian makes the believer do something about it. The findings further show that the participants believe that there is a reward for obedience to God and consequences for disobedience. Arguably, the consequence of continuous disobedience is Hell after death, while the reward for continuous obedience is Heaven.

However, one of the participants, Zoe (15), offered a different perspective in her description of God. According to her:

> We were made to believe that God made the earth. Well, I believe it was science [that caused the formation of the earth]. Then again, I believe there was a God, but there is not enough proof to actually prove that it was God that made the earth. So, I'm on two sides. I believe in God, and I believe in science as well.

Zoe's comment raises a philosophical question about creation. Did God create the earth or did the earth – and the life on it – come to be through the process of evolution, as many scientists believe? Her perspective is similar to the teachings of the Agnostics. For more discussion of her view, see the section on the participants' perceptions of life after death.

The information provided by the above participant revealed her doubts about belief in the creator God. For instance, the comment that "we [church members] were made to believe that it was God that created the earth" indicates that she was just acting on information rather than personal conviction. Although she stated that she believed in the existence of God, she also declared that she believed in the works of science, particularly as regards the creation of the universe. Thus, she said she believed in evolution, rather than creation, as taught in the Bible and in the RCCG, where Zoe is a member. The phrase, 'made to believe,' in the words of this participant, sound like indoctrination. Arguably, the belief about God which this participant held is not voluntary, but the belief of the denomination, and since she is part of the denomination, she felt she had to abide by it.

As stated in chapter 5, under the section on the doctrine of the RCCG, the first fundamental belief of the RCCG is belief in God, the father, as the creator of the Heavens and the earth and everything therein. The fact that the participant referred to God as the creator of the earth, shows that she is familiar with the teachings of the RCCG. Chapter 5 explains the importance that the RCCG places on teachings about these fundamental beliefs and other doctrinal teachings. The core beliefs of the RCCG are so important that they are engraved, every year, at the back of the Church's Sunday school manuals, so that every member of the church can familiarise themselves with them. Additionally, these beliefs constitute important teachings for anyone undergoing inductive training to become a worker in the RCCG.

However, the pessimism expressed by this participant in relation to the belief in God as the creator and in life after death is an indication that even among black teenagers, it is possible to find some who do not align themselves with the conventional beliefs of the church they attend, regardless of how regular they are in church attendance. This finding is consistent with the studies of Francis (2001), and Francis and Robbins (2007). Francis (2001) reported that it is possible for teenagers to be consistent in church attendance yet not share the same beliefs as their church denomination. Francis and Robbins described this inconsistency as 'belonging without believing'. In other words, there is a possibility that there are teenagers, like the participants in this study, who are very active in attending church services and church-related programmes, but who do not share the core principles and beliefs of the church they are affiliated with. This can pose a challenge to the leadership of the local church or denomination, as it can cause confusion amongst worshippers. For example, this might occur if such a person rises to a position of leadership and starts to teach or preach conflicting messages about beliefs.

The doubt about creation expressed by the participant above is in line with the thinking of agnosticism (Russell, 1999) in that she claimed to believe in the existence of God, but doubted that God had created the earth and living creatures. She credited the existence of the earth to the work of science. Modern agnosticism, which was laid out by Thomas Henry Huxley around the turn of the 19th century during a speech to the Metaphysical Society, reflects the framework of thinking he chose to follow as a way of giving a name to his own belief, as other systems of belief likewise have names. This framework of thinking contends that it is not possible to know the truth about matters such as God and the afterlife, which are core components of Christianity and other religions, at least not at the moment (Russell, 1999). Russell identifies two types of agnostic beliefs: agnostic atheism and agnostic theism. It is argued that, although these two share the same pessimistic view - that the existence of God, a higher being, and the afterlife -

are ‘unknowable or unanswerable,’ they are different in the way they conceive of God. Agnostic atheism claims not to know whether or not God exists, and does not believe Him; while Agnostic theism, even though it similarly claims not to know whether or not God exists, still believes in such an existence. Analysis of this participant’s comments indicate that it is likely that she holds the views of the latter, as she claimed that although there is no proof of the existence of God, she still believes God exists. Further inquiry revealed that this particular participant also exhibited pessimism in other areas of religious beliefs, such as life after death and the existence of Hell and Heaven. The next section discusses the beliefs of the participants on death.

9.2 Beliefs about death

The participants of this study described death from two perspectives. First, there is the physical death, and second is the matter of the spiritual death. The participants who described death from a physical perspective maintained that the thought of death is scary, but they all agreed that it is inevitable. Florence (13), when she was questioned about her perspective on death, said, “I haven’t thought about that actually. I always… I don’t know. It always makes me feel sad when I think about the fact that people’s life is ending.” Meanwhile, Rejoice (13) said:

> I think it’s [death] something that’s horrible. As Christians, it’s not a nice thing at all. I think it’s something that can change someone’s mind-set about God, that you wonder, You [God] are the one that brought us into this life. Why are you taking me away again? But then also you’ve got to think from a different perspective. God has a reason why He brought you into this life and He has a chance to take you away whenever He wants.

The participants who described death from the physical point of view said, “Death is like when you get older, maybe you get sick or you just die or because God just wants you to go” (Precious, 14). Or “when our spirit is taking away from the body and the flesh rot or whatever, and the spirit then go[es] to Heaven or Hell” (Georgina, 15). Lucy (13) also described death as:

> Something that is inevitable. And I think a lot of us waste our time trying to avoid it but what we don't realise is that it will happen, whether we like it or not, it will happen. It's something that's there, and you just have to live with it. If you live your life trying to avoid death, then you will never do anything because there is a risk in everything you do, you know. Some people just went to the train station to travel to their destination, not knowing that will be their last. I think you just have to live and trust that God knows what He is doing.

To illustrate further the inevitability of death, Shimon (14), declared, "I believe that death is something everyone will experience whatever your status is - whether you're wise or you're foolish, or whether you're rich or you're poor. Everyone will die one day because death… physical death is inevitable."

Meanwhile, participants such as Jane (15), who described death from the spiritual perspective, also admitted that it is not a good place to be, because it is a state of disconnection with God. This means that the person will be vulnerable to attack from the devil. According to Jane:

> Death can be like when you lose the connection with God. You feel, like, lost! So then you feel like you can't do anything that you are able to do before! So, like, basically, you are on your own, and at the end of the day, you are not really part of it [God's family] anymore or anything. You might just want to do whatever you want.

To Jane, death is not just the physical cessation of existence but also a spiritual separation from God, which occurs when the relationship between man and God is severed. Jane's description of death from a spiritual perspective follows the teachings of the RCCG, the context of this study. This denomination does not believe in eternal salvation; hence, the teaching of the Church is that after salvation, continual obedience, demonstrated through a life of holiness, is the key to entering Heaven, and any disobedience or sin will cause separation between the person and God, which automatically results in the loss of salvation. The Church also teaches that genuine repentance leads to the restoration of this connection.

Considerable attention has been paid to studies on beliefs about death, mainly because of the anxiety surrounding the issue of death (Greenberg, Solomon, & Pyszczynski, 1997) and life

after death. Studies show that there is a positive relationship between belief in life after death and psychological issues related to death and dying (Holden, 1993; Penny, 2014). Arguably, those who believe in life after death have a more positive disposition during the time of bereavement (Smith, Range, & Ulmer, 1992). They also espouse less support for the practice of euthanasia (Holden, 1993).

The findings in this study show that the participants considered death from two perspectives, the physical and the spiritual. Physically, death is described as the cessation of life. In other words, a dead person ceases to live physically. Although the findings show that some participants had not thought of death, those who did stated that the thought of death is scary. The participants all agreed that death is inevitable, although their opinions vary on what happens once a person is dead. This study's participants who described death from a spiritual perspective maintained that it is possible for someone to be physically alive and still be dead. This is called the spiritual death. They contended that such a death occurs when there is no relationship between a person and God. This may be because such a person did not accept Jesus as Lord and saviour, which is called salvation, or because he/she did not or stopped living a life of Holiness, which the subjects of this study considered to be a prerequisite to having a connection or relationship with God. While the majority believe that there is life after death, a few claimed that they are not sure of what comes after death. Even those who professed their belief in the existence of life after death still expressed doubt about whether God will allow some people to go to Heaven and send others to Hell. Will God allow those who live a holy life after accepting Jesus Christ by not committing sin to go to Heaven while those who do not accept Jesus or who commit sin, even after they have accepted Jesus, go to Hell? This question came up as a concern among the participants in this study.

Consistent with this study is Palmquist (1992), which demonstrated that even though adolescents have a rational understanding of death, they still engage in risky behaviour because their sense of the possibility of death and their anxiety over death differs from that of adults. Nevertheless, the participants in this study demonstrated their sense of fear, not of what will happen after death, although this may be true for some of them, but of how they see people, including their peers, dying every day, either from terrorist attacks, sickness or disease, such as cancer, or motor accidents. Concerning physical death, all the participants acknowledged their understanding of the torments that death could bring to families and friends of the deceased person. The next section presents the findings on life after death.

9.3 Beliefs about life after death: Heaven and Hell

Beliefs about life after death constitute one of the paramount issues in the RCCG. This is because teachings on the afterlife, in addition to many other topics, are part of the faith tenets of the RCCG. The teachings of the RCCG regarding life after death are tied to Heaven and Hell. The RCCG believes that Heaven and Hell are real. According to the teachings of the RCCG, the believers who 'walk in righteousness' by not sinning, or Christians who continue to live a righteous life by not committing sins, will go to Heaven when they die, or will be rapturable if rapture comes first. Rapture in this sense means when Jesus comes in the cloud to take the believers in His name to be with Him. But the unbelievers and the believers who sin will go to Hell. The participants of this study did not separate life after death from Heaven and Hell, as they see one leading to the other. For example, those who believe there is life after death believe that as one dies, he either goes to Heaven or Hell straightaway, depending on what the person did here on earth, after accepting Jesus as Lord and saviour. They all believed that after salvation, each Christian is called to live a Holy life, and without that, no one will see God. It is even evident from the study that some participants, like Oscar (13), find it difficult

to demarcate between death, life after death and Heaven and Hell. Oscar claimed that any time he thinks of death, "I instantly think about Heaven and Hell." To explain his thoughts further, Oscar said:

> Because, as Christians, if we take [accept] Jesus as our Lord and saviour, and do [obey] the Ten Commandments, and avoid sin, then we will go to Heaven. However, other Christians might think differently from that, they might think everyone will go to Heaven. I believe that God gave us a choice to be with him or not. As it says in John 3:16, "For God so loved the world that He gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life," so that's what I believe."

Nevertheless, Mary (13), as an example, expressed her doubts about what happens after someone dies, saying: "Erm, death is a scary thing. Erm, when you die, you don't know whether you are going to Hell or Heaven, and you don't know if you are going to remain on the earth for judgement day." The uncertainty that surrounds what happens after a man dies seems to make the thought of death scary yet unpredictable, as these teenagers said they have witnessed close relatives dying or have read or heard the news of people who die on a daily basis. However, they claimed that they are not bothered about death anyway because if they die, they will see Jesus.

As previously revealed, some of the participants linked their beliefs about death and life after death to Heaven and Hell, because they think they are interconnected. However, other participants, like Rejoice (13), expressed the belief that while death could be the physical cessation of existence, there is another abode where dead people are expected to go after leaving this world. She stated that:

> I think there is a life after death. I think that also has to do with how you follow God's words on earth. I think there is definitely somewhere you are going after life. It might be Hell, it might be Heaven. So, the rapture could come any day from now; so, you've got to really look at yourself and wonder, if the rapture is to come today, am I ready to go? Is God going to accept me into His kingdom?

Similarly, Moses (15) commented:

> I believe there is life after death. Spiritually, Heaven, but [it] is really hard to actually prove that when someone dies, he goes to Heaven, because they can't really say anything about it. But I know there is a life after death, it has to be.

From the above extracts, it is evident that the interviewees, even though they have knowledge of what is beyond this life, still doubt the reality and the nature of the afterlife because it is beyond rational comprehension. Is the afterlife real? And if so, will I be admitted to Heaven or Hell? These questions are difficult to answer because, as one of the participants observed, no one has actually gone to the afterlife and come back to recount their experiences.

The question of what happens after life is not new; it has vexed people from ancient times. For example, Biblical Job asked the same question, saying, "If a man dies, shall he live again?" (Job 14:14a, King James Version). There are many scriptural passages that talk about life after death, such as Daniel (12: 2, KJV), which says: "And many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt." In addition, before bringing Lazarus, the man who was dead for four days, back to life, Jesus declared to Martha, one of the sisters of Lazarus, "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live" (John 11:25). This occurred after Martha had told Jesus, "I know that he [Lazarus] will rise again in the resurrection at the last day" (John 11:24). Nevertheless, it is still difficult today to be precise about the nature of the afterlife. All we could do is rely on what is taught in the Bible about the subject matter and wait. As Job declared in Job (14:14b): "all the days of my appointed time will I wait, till my change."

These findings show that many of the participants believe in life after death. It is evident that this belief has given the participants the hope that death is not the end in itself, but rather is a transition to another world. The findings have also shown that the participants' opinions are divided about what life after death will be like. Although all the participants, except one,

believe that Heaven and Hell are real, they differed from one another on what will qualify one to enter Heaven. The participants in this study portrayed Heaven as a happy place where one will be able to be united with God and enjoy everlasting happiness.

Meanwhile, Hell is portrayed as the opposite of Heaven. The participants described Hell as a place of torture, whose inhabitants will burn in fire for eternity without any way of escape. All the participants, including the one that expressed a bit of doubt about the existence of Heaven and Hell, still believe in, and hope they will all make it to Heaven. However, the findings have revealed that many of the participants still demonstrate some uneasiness about what qualities are essential for entering Heaven, and lack assurance that they have done enough to merit Heaven, even though they claimed to have accepted Jesus into their lives as Lord and saviour. This uneasiness is compounded by the doctrine of the RCCG, as stated in the previous section. The RCCG, as a denomination, is very firm on living a pure and holy life. The denomination teaches that holiness, which is depicted as the absence of sin, is a key factor to inheriting the kingdom of God.

According to this doctrine, anyone who sins, regardless of whether they claim to be 'born again' or not, will not make it to Heaven (Hunt, 2002). The findings are consistent with Hunt (2002). Hunt, whose research was carried out among members of one of the RCCG parishes in London, argues that the teachings on purity in the RCCG are intended to help members maintain boundaries of identity, individually and collectively, from the British society. As a result, members have been admonished to stay away from the corruption, which plights Nigeria, the original setting of the denomination. However, the findings in this study revealed that the participants linked the life of purity to issues of life after death.

Similar to this study's findings, the existing literature has shown that belief in life after death is important because of its ability to shape the behaviour and attitudes of people towards religion and spirituality. This has galvanised scholars, particularly psychologists, to pay special attention to the study of life after death (Flynn & Kunkel, 1987; Greeley & Hout, 1999; Harley & Firebaugh, 1993; Hynson, 1975, 1978; Lester *et al*., 2002; Schoenrade, 1989). Empirical studies have reported that the General Social Survey conducted among Americans revealed that about 80% to 95% of Americans believe in life after death, a number, which is said to have risen in recent years, despite reports of fewer people attending church services and public prayer programmes (Greeley & Hout, 1999; Schwadel, 2011).

However, Penny (2014) conducted a study among a sample of 5,199 teenagers aged between 13 and 15 (the same age bracket as this present study) in England and Wales, using the Young People's Values Survey, including the Francis Scale of Attitude toward Christianity. She reported that 18.1% of her participants agree strongly with the belief in life after death, 20.8% agree with the belief, 35.3% were not sure of whether or not to believe that there is life after death, 10.0% disagree, and 15.8% disagree strongly with the belief in life after death.

In another study, Aríes (1981) revealed that beliefs about life after death varied widely over the centuries in different countries and different denominations, and this has made it difficult to ascertain the historical precedents for this belief, even though the findings in this study demonstrate that the majority of the participants believe in life after death. The extant literature suggests that there is a relationship between denominational affiliation and beliefs about Heaven and Hell. For example, the findings of Exline and Yali (2002) among their undergraduate sample reveal that there is a difference in the belief in life after death between

Catholic and Protestant members. According to their findings, the Protestant students have a greater belief in Heaven and Hell than the Catholics.

Arguably, this belief is influenced by the differences in the way both Churches relate to the issues of religion and spirituality. The Protestants are reportedly very keen on religion and spirituality compared to Catholics. This has an impact on the belief in Heaven and Hell (Lester *et al*., 2002). Perhaps, Protestants are more likely to believe in Heaven and Hell and therefore are more likely to accept the belief in life after death than Catholics (Greeley & Hout, 1999; Harley & Firebaugh, 1993; Hynson, 1975; Klenow & Bolin, 1989). Studies have shown that greater belief in life after death, particularly Heaven and Hell, among the Protestants, is likely to come from the hard approach on sin, conversion and the redemptive work of Jesus through His death on the cross, which are emphasised in Protestant, as well as in many Pentecostal, churches (Noll, Bebbington, & Rawlyk, 1994). It is also argued that the emphasis on Heaven and Hell differs among Protestants.

While Fundamental Protestants have a strong emphasis on the belief in Heaven and Hell, moderate and liberal Protestants are said to place less emphasis on this aspect of belief. Instead, they emphasise historical tradition, social justice and tolerance (Malony, 1998). Similarly, the findings of Cohen *et al*. (2005) reveal a similarity between the belief in life after death amongst Protestants and Catholics, and that it is religiously interpreted to a greater extent by Protestants than Catholics.

Meanwhile, it is also suggested that culture can influence one's beliefs about life after death (Greeley & Hout, 1999; Harley & Firebaugh, 1993). Although this area of research has not been verified in this study, it is possible that the beliefs about life after death held by the sample

in this study are partly influenced by culture as well as denomination. The interviewees in this study are all black teenagers from an African background, where teachings about life after death, whether from a Christian or traditional perspective, are very important. It is therefore a probability that this might have exerted an influence on the beliefs held by the participants.

Although empirical studies on the relationship between race or ethnicity and beliefs about life after death are few, Coke (1992), Husaini, Blasi, and Miller (1999), and Musick *et al*. (1998) identified race as a factor that can influence the relationship between religion and spirituality and beliefs about death and life after death, and the anxiety associated with death. Arguably, among previous research participants, religion and spirituality have a stronger relationship with the perception of life after death among African Americans than for their White counterparts (Cohen *et al*., 2005), even though they share the same faith. In the same manner, all the participants in this study are from a black African origin, which can be assumed to influence their perceptions of death and life after death, although no interview question addressed this directly.

Additionally, in a different research study, Anderson (1993) revealed that many Africans, in particular, those that attend New Pentecostal Churches, believe in the eternal existence of their ancestors and that it is essential to carry out rituals to appease them in order to live peacefully here on earth. He reported that although many of his participants believed that Christians do not need to do anything special in this regard, a few of them still agreed that rituals should be made to these ancestors because they have the power to bless or harm their descendants. However, the findings of this study did not yield any evidence of such rituals amongst the participants, even though the RCCG denomination is categorised under the New Pentecostal

Churches, and all the participants in this study share the same cultural background with Anderson's participants.

Among all the participants, Zoe (15) took a different approach to the belief in life after death by categorically stating that she does not believe that there is going to be any life after death. According to her:

> I believe that after we die, we decompose. And most of us (Christians) believe that we are going to Heaven, but I believe that after I die, I am going to decompose and that is the end of it…Erm, there is no proof that there is Heaven, we are still waiting for that.

Zoe's belief was guided by the fact that, according to her, there is no scientific or physical evidence to prove that such a life exists. Zoe's beliefs, not just about life after death, but also about God, seem to have come as a result of her exposure to two different worldviews from two powerful social contexts in her life. The first one is the Church and the second is the school she attends. According to Zoe, the teachings of the Church, about many Biblical and doctrinal issues, differ from that of the school. This has led her to question the authenticity of some of these teachings, including teachings on God and creation as well as the life after death. This is how Zoe (15) expressed her confusion:

> Ever since I've been going to church, I have been learning new things about God and Jesus. So, my faith in God has increased because of what they teach me in [the] church. But then again, because I go to Catholic school, they teach me different things in Catholic school than in the Church. So, it's kind of hard to know which one to believe in.

This confusion that Zoe experienced has led her to tend towards an agnostic view. An agnostic mind is one that is full of doubt and uncertainty. The confusion that Zoe felt was revealed in her statement when she said, "Erm, there is no proof that there is Heaven, we are still waiting for that, but I believe that I will go to Heaven." Despite claiming that there is no proof of the existence of Heaven and Hell, she still felt certain that, if there is a Heaven eventually, she will surely go there. This shows how dangerous it could be for a child (teenager) to grow up with

contradictory opinions, especially on issues that are pertinent to faith, like the beliefs that were mentioned earlier. This is because exposure to contradictory perspectives could lead to complete disbelief in whatever is taught, whether in the Church or in the school, as regards faith. Having looked at the different beliefs that the participants of this study hold on God, death, and life after death, including Heaven and Hell, the next section presents the accounts of death and life after death from scholarly viewpoints.

As noted above, the findings in this study revealed that, as in the case of beliefs about God, not all the teenage participants hold the same belief about life after death. This is confirmed by the comments from one of the participants that her belief in life after death is subject to scientific proof, and since there is none, there are no grounds for her to believe in it. This uncertainty, like her uncertainty about creation, finds common ground with the beliefs of agnosticism. Russell (1999) noted that the agnostic framework holds that there can be nothing like Heaven or Hell or survival after death without evidence to back it up. Hence, since there is no rational evidence of this, beyond dispute, the agnostics deny its existence. The findings in this study show that although the participant did not express outright disbelief in the existence of Heaven and Hell, she claimed that her judgement on it would be based on whatever evidence is available to prove they exist. According to her, physical death must be the end, as there is no tangible evidence to prove otherwise, the evidence and teachings from the scriptures and doctrinal teachings of her church denomination notwithstanding. Her argument was that no one has gone to Heaven or Hell and come back to relate their experiences. However, she said she was open to discussion, if there is tangible evidence of life after death, then she is sure of making it to Heaven, and until then, all the teachings of the church on life after death are just speculation to her.

9.4 Reasons for the belief in life after death

Although this study does not specifically investigate the reasons for the belief in life after death among the participants, studies have shown that many theories have been proposed to explain the origin of this belief. These theories include the simulation constraint framework, the imaginative obstacle theory, offline social reasoning and social embodiment theory, and the terror management theory. More details about each of these theories are provided below.

First, the simulation constraint framework (Bering, 2002; Penny, 2014) argues that beliefs about life after death came into existence because of people's inability to experience or "simulate a state of non-existence" (Penny, 2014, p. 224). According to Bering (2002), this simulation constraint led to speculation about what happens to an individual after death, and ultimately, beliefs about the afterlife. Subsequent researchers (e.g. Bering, Blasi, & Bjorklund, 2005; Harris & Giménez, 2005) have explored this theory in their work, establishing that "children and young people intuitively believe that the psychological states of another individual survive the bodily death of that same individual" (Penny, 2014, p. 224). However, critics of the theory, such as Hodge (2011), argue that there is no evidence to demonstrate how this simulation constraint makes it possible for people to imagine that other people could still exist even though they are dead, while they cannot imagine the same for themselves. The imaginative obstacle theory proposes that it is natural to believe in life after death because there is an 'imaginative block' imbedded in our brain, which facilitates the development of beliefs about life after death (Nichols, 2007). Critics of this theory have argued that it fails to provide an adequate account on why the imaginative obstacle does not allow for the imagination of present non-existence but only future non-existence (Hodge, 2011).

The third theory is the offline social reasoning and social embodiment theory (Hodge, 2011). This theory argues that natural beliefs about life after death came from the offline social reasoning process by which people think about those who are close to them, but are not present in the immediate environment, as present in another place where they continue to function in the same way as they were doing when they were present. According to this theory, life after death is perceived in the form of social activities, as it maintains that "those who have passed are not annihilated by physical death, but are simply socially embodied in an eternal realm" (Hodge, 2011, p. 406).

The last theory is the terror management theory (Pyszczynski, Greenberg, & Soloman, 1999). This theory holds that the belief in life after death stems from constant anxiety, whether conscious or unconscious, which people experience as a result of the fear of death and of what will happen to them after they die. According to this theory, the imminent fear of death creates an inclination to accept or construct cultural worldviews which "provide meaning, purpose, value, and hope of either literal or symbolic immortality, through either an afterlife or a connection to something greater than oneself that transcends one's mortal existence" (Pyszczynski, Rothschild, & Abdollahi, 2008, p. 318). In other words, a strong belief in life after death should alleviate the apprehension that death might cause by providing "psychological protection against the fear of death and death anxiety" (Penny, 2014, p. 226). Hodge (2011) criticised the terror management theory on the basis that it relies too much on the awareness of the prospect of death and the experience of anxiety amongst individuals. Furthermore, the terror management theory cannot account for the presence of a belief in life after death in young children as a result of their lack of understanding of their own death and life after death. However, studies have consistently revealed that although young children may not be able to understand the prospect of their own deaths. (Cox, Garrett, & Graham, 2005),

they are able to understand the deaths of others (Bering & Bjorklund, 2004; Bering, Blasi, & Bjorklund, 2005).

Contrary to the terror management theory, there is no evidence in this study to show that the beliefs about life after death among the participants stem from the fear of death. However, the study shows that the participants' beliefs are based on Biblical teachings as well as the doctrinal teachings of the RCCG. The findings in this study are consistent with many scholarly reports which frame life after death beliefs, particularly beliefs about Heaven, in a positive way. The description of Heaven, as shown in this study, is that it is a place of comfort and happiness, where every pain and trouble will vanish. Arguably, the thought of Heaven as a good place has been a source of comfort to those who are going through bereavement, loss or unpleasant situations in life. For example, it has been argued that the belief in Heaven is likely to ameliorate the emotion of bereavement within the Christian community (Lester *et al*., 2002).

Similarly, the findings in this study show that the participants also believe in Hell. The belief held about Hell by the participants in this study is similar to the findings of Hood *et al*. (1996). According to Hood *et al*., the majority of Americans, as of the mid-1990s, believed in Hell. Furthermore, the majority of those who consider Hell to be real are concerned about life after death (Exline & Yali, 2002). Arguably, the Biblical teachings on both Heaven (Matthew 5:12; Luke 10:20) and Hell (Matthew 5:29; II Peter 2:4), play a part in the way these two concepts are understood, although there is a more general societal belief associated with life after death as well (Hynson, 1975; Klenow & Bolin, 1989).

There is no evidence in this study to show that the participants were concerned or have feelings of anger over whether their beloved ones who have died will be in Heaven or Hell, as some

researchers have claimed. For instance, Exline, Yali, and Lobel (1999) maintained that anxiety and distress over whether dead loved ones would go to Hell could cause feelings of anger and alienation toward God among living relatives. Arguably, it could also place an additional burden on surviving relatives who are not sure whether their loved ones have gone to Heaven or not, as they visualise the kind of suffering that these people could be going through and the thought of permanent separation between them and their loved ones rather than a temporary one.

However, there is evidence to show that the belief in Hell and Heaven could be one of the motivational factors for evangelism among the participants. Lucy (13) declared:

> Erm, I believe in heaven and I believe in hell, and I believe that they are determined by our works on this planet. I believe that this place is a temporary place, and that this is not a place where we are supposed to be; and I believe that after death, I don't know. I can't say that I'm sure, because I'm not. You know, is one of those things that you don't find out until you get to that point; but I do strongly believe that this is a temporary place for us. We've been placed on this earth to bring people into the kingdom of God and that is our final destination. (Lucy, 13)

According to the above participant, the world we are in now is a temporary place. The reason for the existence of believers, like herself, is to bring people to the kingdom of God, which literally means heaven. And if this is the primary purpose of living, to her, evangelism is paramount. This is in agreement with Exiline (2003), who argues that the belief in life after death could potentially lead to a desire to convert others to Christianity or for 'spiritual purification', which occurs through the confession of one's sins and increased involvement in religious activities. It can also lead to propagation of the gospel to the unbelievers. In addition, in the RCCG, where the present participants were recruited, evangelism is one of the important beliefs and a great emphasis is placed on it. As a result of its importance, it is expected in the RCCG that every member, including teenagers, take part in evangelism, which involves

preaching to other people, including their relatives and family members, who they may not be sure are saved.

The findings in this study show that while many of the participants accepted that the thought of life after death causes them to be afraid, the thought of Heaven eases this fear. Even though some of the participants demonstrated uncertainty about what will happen after they die, they still maintained that they will enter Heaven based on their personal beliefs. However, a few of the participants exhibited pessimism about what happens after death. All of the participants were more eager to talk about Heaven rather than Hell, probably because the description of Hell, both in the Bible and at the Church, is as a very terrible place, and this may have created anxiety and fear in the lives of these teenagers.

The fear of death and life after death is also moderate among the participants in this study, as many of them believe that their dead loved ones were 'born again' when they were still alive and they also have the hope of making it to Heaven based on their professed faith and claims of righteous living. This is partially consistent with Bering's (2002) findings of no significant relationship between death anxiety and the belief in life after death among his participants. Invariably, the belief in life after death cannot be exclusively attributed to a fear of death.

9.5 Belief in life after death and church attendance

The findings in this study have demonstrated that there is a link between church attendance and the religious beliefs that the participants hold. The participants of this study are all affiliated with the RCCG, where they worship at least once a week. They attested that the teachings they receive in their local churches have shaped their Christianity, including the beliefs they hold about life after death. This is consistent with prior studies, which have found a relationship

between church attendance and belief in life after death amongst adults and young people (Aday, 1984; Ochsmann, 1984). However, Exline and Yali (2002) revealed that there are differences in individual reactions to the belief in Heaven and Hell, and age could play a part in beliefs about life after death. For example, Noppe, Lloyd, and Noppe (1997) confirmed that teenagers have a greater tendency to believe in life after death than young children.

Additionally, Cohen *et al*. (2005), investigating the relationship between belief in life after death and mental concepts among young people, demonstrate that young people who believe in life after death have higher levels of life satisfaction than those who do not. Greeley and Hout (1999), through their General Social Survey carried out between 1983 and 1984, revealed that about 85% to 95% of Christians who claimed to believe in life after death were likely to believe that it will also involve an entrance into a union with God, with dead relatives and peace. Similarly, Greeley and Hout reported that about three quarters of people with no religious affiliation but who believed in life after death were more likely to believe in Heaven alone, while only 60% were likely believe in Hell.

Studies have also shown that the belief in life after death has a tendency to influence the behaviour and attitude of individuals, including teenagers (Lester *et al*., 2002; Tsai, 2008). Arguably, there is a relationship between belief in life after death and one's outlook on life (Dixon & Kinlaw, 1982). Some researchers (e.g. Lester *et al*., 2002; Tsai, 2008) have shown that people who believe that they will have a union with God, a reunion with family and friends, and the comfort provided by the assurance of Heaven have experienced a peaceful transition, with no signs of fear or stress at death.

Ochsmann (1984) found that the increased prominence of death is positively related to a greater reported belief in life after death, although Ochsmann (1984) maintained that this claim has not been confirmed by other studies. However, Peterson and Greil (1990) reported that the participants in their study, who knew people who died prior to the time of their interviews, claimed that the experience had given them a feeling of closeness to God, demonstrated through their literal belief in the Bible, attendance of church, and regular prayer.

Despite the above reports and others like them, such as Berman (1974), more substantive support is still needed to show that experiencing a life-threatening situation could strengthen the belief in life after death. Meanwhile, it is reported by Krause *et al*. (2002) that the fear of punishment after death leads to higher levels of anxiety and stress among people who consider themselves not religious but still believe in an afterlife.

9.6 Chapter summary

This chapter has argued that religious and spiritual beliefs are very important to the participants in this study. Particular attention has been paid to the beliefs about God, death and life after death. The chapter has revealed some consistency with prior research on beliefs about religion and spirituality among teenagers. This includes the fact that the participants in this study do not only believe in the existence of Heaven but also Hell. However, the study shows the type of belief demonstrated by the participants is one that has the capacity to drive them to the worship of God. In other words, it is an active belief as opposed to an ordinary claim of religiosity. The study also reveals that not all the participants share the same beliefs about God, death, and life after death, including the beliefs about Heaven and Hell. It has been argued that this is consistent with previous scholastic work showing that it is possible for teenagers to be affiliated with a particular religious community, yet not share all of that group's religious

beliefs (Francis, 2001, 2013). The next chapter discusses the religious and spiritual experiences of the participants.

Chapter Ten: Religious and Spiritual Experiences

10.0 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to discuss the findings on the religious and spiritual experiences of the participants of this study. This chapter is important because the findings in this study revealed that each of the participants reported to have a personal relationship with God, which in this case is described as a religious and spiritual experience. Although studies (Brierley, 2005; Davie, 1994; Garnet *et al*., 2006) have asserted that contemporary teenagers, particularly in the UK, are less religious than the previous generation. The findings in this study demonstrated that the participants individually have a personal relationship with God, which results in their walking with Him. Even though the experience of a particular incident is personal and subjective to the person who experienced it, it is argued that defining an experience as religious or not depends on one's interpretation of it and on the public, because the epistemological value of the experience is dependent on the broad interpretations of society (Pretorius, 2008). In other words, interpretations offer meanings that are not naturally apparent to those outside the context of the experience.

Similar to the challenge of defining religion and spirituality, it is difficult to describe religious and spiritual experiences as separate entities because of their interrelatedness (Koenig, McCullough, & Larson, 2001). Experience in this context is used in line with Pretorius (2008) to mean "what we think and how we believe" (p. 148). It also denotes the way the participants react to circumstances of life, including religion and spirituality (Spilka, Hood, & Gorsuch, 1985, p. 154). In other terms, it means a form of knowledge, emotion and feelings that are acquired as a result of an external or internal reality, which affects the perceptions, reactions and the existence of a particular person. When an experience is related to religion and spirituality, it means it serves as a way of maintaining and developing a relationship with God

as a result of having a better understanding and revelation of the existence of God or a sacred being. Such experience also involves a personal involvement in religious activities, particularly in terms of prayer, worship and rituals. Religious and spiritual experience can also mean an individual's personal and positive experiences concerning religion and spirituality, as manifested in the relationship, attitude and approach of the experiencer towards God and the sacred (Boczkowska & Zięba, 2016). Arguably, religious and spiritual experience involves an acceptance of salvation, "a sense of unity, solitude and peace, or a warm feeling while participating in the rituals, or a strong urge to commit to certain principles of one's belief" (Pretorius, 2008, p. 149). Additionally, it can be described as the relationship established with God by the believers as a result of their religious beliefs (Grant *et al*., 2004).

Since there is no singular way of defining religious and spiritual experiences, the description used in this study follows most of the descriptions above. In this study, religious and spiritual experience refers to the first-hand account of experiences the participants had in which they felt a profound connection to God or which affected the way they relate to Christianity. It also relates to the personal relationship of worship they follow both on an individual basis through prayers and studying the Bible. In addition, it includes the involvement of the participants in communal worship with other believers within or outside church settings.

Previous studies (e.g. Grzymała-Moszczyńska, 1991; Hood, Hill, & Spilka, 2009) have proved that religious and spiritual experience is not a new area of research, as many studies have been conducted on them in the past. Amongst these is the study carried out by Alister Hardy and his team between 1969 and 1979, where the participants were asked to relay their first-hand experiences (Hardy, 1979). Hardy reported that his findings indicate that religious and spiritual experiences have evolved through a process of natural selection, as they provide value for the

survival of the experiencer (Hay, 2002). Hardy, as cited in Hay (2002), argued that the awareness of religious and spiritual experience is universal and rooted biologically in the human species. Hardy's study demonstrated that most people in the UK maintained that they had had some form of positive religious experience, even when they claimed not to belong to a religious institution, or have religious beliefs (Hay, 2002). His study revealed that the participants claimed that they experience the presence of God, and that God does answer prayers by providing help when needed. Similarly, David Hay's study, which was carried out in the late 1970s and 1980s among a group of education students at the University of Nottingham, focused on the spiritual experiences of his participants and reported a similar outcome as that of Hardy (Hay & Heald, 1987). Additionally, the study of Boczkowska and Zięba (2016), carried out in Poland, also revealed that the majority of their participants were able to identify and describe religious and spiritual experiences without difficulty, even though they described spiritual experiences as separate from religious experiences. This shows that despite many arguments on the diminishing of religion and spirituality among teenagers, there is evidence that it is the method of relating to them that has changed, not the fact of experiences themselves. Many people now relate to religion and spirituality in their own way, outside church institutions (Boczkowska & Zięba, 2016).

This study revealed that the interview participants have had religious and spiritual experiences both on an individual basis and in public within the church institution. They also claimed that religious and spiritual experiences are important to them because they form the basis of their understanding and commitment to religion and spirituality. Consistent with the interpretive phenomenological approach, which emphasises the individual's interpretation of the data, the religious and spiritual experiences of the participants are personal and vary from one individual to another (Pargament, 1997, 1999; Zinnbauer, Pargament, & Scott, 1999). The variation in

experience occurs as a result of factors such as personality, social context, personal background, and life experiences, all of which differentiate the participants and mean that even the same experience could be interpreted differently (Hood, Hill, & Spilka, 2009). As a result of the wide range of religious and spiritual experiences, this study focused on three aspects that are essential to the participants, specifically conversion experience, personal experience, and communal experience.

10.1 The experience of conversion

Conversion is understood in this study in relation to the concept of being born again. This indicates the point at which the participant accepted Jesus Christ into their lives. It is also known as being saved. In other words, the conversion experience, in this study, relates to salvation. Salvation, or being born again, is an important step to becoming a Christian in Pentecostal churches like the RCCG, the context of this study (Regnerus & Burdette, 2006). To be considered a Christian in the RCCG, one must be able to describe his or her conversion experience. The findings show that the process of conversion centres on the time when the Holy Spirit comes into the heart of the participants as a result of their acceptance of Jesus into their lives. This results in changes in the way they relate to life issues in general, including decisions they make and the way they behave, while still maintaining their authentic person. Although it is possible to argue that only adults would be able to recount their conversion experience, Smith (2003) has shown that this experience is not limited to adults, as children and teenagers have also experienced being converted or born again. Although Smith (2003) declares that the experience of conversion among youth takes place mainly in churches, this present study found no evidence to suggest that all the participants experienced conversion in the church, as they did not place emphasis on the context of their conversion experience.

However, they all described their conversion experience as the foundational stone on which every other religious and spiritual experience they have had is based.

Although the majority of the participants had difficulty recalling an event in their life that constituted a turning point, they all testified that some changes occurred in their lives after their conversion experience. For example, they claimed that there was a time in their lives when they started to have a personal relationship with Jesus, which led to a change in attitude and behaviour. Because of this relationship, they claimed they could confidently approach God through prayer and studying the Bible with understanding. Additionally, they maintained that their personal relationship with Jesus gave them assurance of heaven after leaving this world. Consistent with the teachings of the RCCG, the participants also stated that after conversion, it is necessary for believers to continue to live a life of holiness by obeying the commandments of God as laid out in the Bible. Arguably, a personal relationship and a continuous striving for personal growth are important as they progress in their walk with God.

Rambo (1993) argued that there are no fundamental differences between the processes of conversion to various religions, as the process rather encompasses a gradual intensification, as is common within traditional mainstream churches. However, the conversion experience propagated by the New Pentecostal Movement, which is the context of this study, differs from the typical pattern identified by Rambo. This experience is one that is obvious and spontaneous, even though there might be several processes that lead to the final stage.

In any case, all conversion experiences, whether spontaneous or gradual, involve change. However, Paloutzian, Richardson, and Rambo (1999) cautioned that care must be taken to identify the different factors that operate in conversion and to carefully define the nature of the

change that takes place during the conversion experience before any conclusions are drawn regarding the authenticity of the conversion.

The conversion experience, as described by the participants in this study, is consistent with the description of conversion in the extant literature (Hanigan, 1983; Hood, Hill, & Spilka, 2009; Rambo, 1993). For example, Rambo (1993) described conversion as "a total transformation of the person by the power of God" (Rambo, 1993, p. xii). It also involves "the initiative of God's action, [leading to] a two-sided, inseparable response - the acknowledgment and confession of one's lostness and sinfulness as well as the acceptance of a call to holiness" (Hanigan, 1983, p. 25). Curran (1970) described conversion as "the central moral message of Jesus, thus making it the foundational experience of the Christian way of life" (p. 25). The conversion experience described in this study also emphasises the active involvement of the believer. As Schnackenberg (1965) noted, conversion refers to a time when an individual consciously enters into a relationship with God. Meanwhile, Wallis (1981) referred to it as a turning away from the darkness to walk in the light, a putting off of the old self to put on the new, a change of mind and heart so as to put on the mind of Christ. Arguably, conversion is the foundation on which every other Christian experience is based. This is why Hanigan (1983) referred to it as "the foundational experience of Christian ethics" (p. 26).

Hanigan (1983), in describing conversion, used three Biblical examples to illustrate the experience. The first of these was Isaiah's encounter with the Lord in a vision (Isaiah 6:1-13). In this event, Isaiah, although already a priest in Israel, saw the glory of God filling the earth and his own sinfulness. This experience brought about "feelings of awe, reverence, and holy fear" (Hanigan, 1983, p. 26), which elicited Isaiah's recognition of his sinfulness and that of his community. Hanigan stated that the conversion experience of Isaiah is "an unlooked for

awakening to the presence of transcendent reality, not just of God's awareness but God's awareness of him" (p.26). Isaiah's experience gave him new insight into the relationship between the divine God and human beings. Immediately, Isaiah's orientation of himself and his world shifted. Hanigan argued that although this reorientation was unpleasant and unwelcome initially (verse 6); it ends with comfort and hope being imparted by God.

Secondly, Hanigan (1983) argued that the event of Peter meeting with Jesus by the seaside (Luke 5:1-11; Matt. 4: 18-22) could be regarded as a conversion experience. Peter's conversion thus began with the miraculous catch of fish he had after lending his boat to Jesus. This experience stirred up in Peter an awareness that Jesus was more than just an ordinary human, ultimately revealing the awe-inspiring, astonishing and hallow nature of Jesus. Like Isaiah, this experience brought Peter to his knees as he confessed before Jesus "Leave me, Lord; I am a sinful man" (Luke 5:9). But Jesus told him not to be afraid (Luke 5:11). Consequentially, just as the conversion experience of Isaiah led to a new ministry, whereby he filled the vacuum of spiritual leadership for the people of Israel, Peter's experience led to a new life in the ministry of following Jesus and bringing people into the kingdom of God.

Although the social setting where the conversion of Peter happened was different from that of Isaiah, Peter's experience is similar because it brought about an instant and unprecedented awareness of the presence of 'transcendent reality', just as had occurred during the conversion experience of Isaiah. This experience led Peter, just like Isaiah, to shift his focus from self to God. Finally, the third example of conversion, as stated by Hanigan (1983), is the 'Pauline' experience (Acts 9:1-19, 22:1-16, 26:12-23). Hanigan argued that the experience of Paul is similar to that of Isaiah because they both take the form of a 'private vision'. However, Paul's experience differed in that it came after Paul, also known as Saul before the conversion, out of

personal zealotry to preserve the integrity of Judaism, embarked on a mission of persecuting Christians, whom he regarded as heretics propagating a different religion. At one point during this journey, Paul was surrounded by a voice from Heaven, which made him fall to the ground. He heard a voice from heaven accusing him of persecuting Him (Jesus), even though it was the Christians that Paul was persecuting. This voice then told Paul to go to Damascus where he would receive further instruction.

Paul, who had been blinded by the brightness of the light that shone on him during his conversion experience on the way to Damascus, received a supernatural healing of sight as Ananias, having being instructed by Jesus, prayed for Paul before telling him about the ministry that the Lord had for him. Paul's experience, which happened in a hasty manner, led to a complete transformation of his life and career. Hanigan (1983) noted that the above three examples, as portrayed in the Bible, suggest that an encounter with God that leads to conversion could happen in an abrupt way, without direct input from the converts, but this does not mean that the converts were completely naïve about the spiritual and psychological preparation for such an experience. Rather, the rapidity, as well as the decisive change that the experience caused, is what qualifies them as conversion experiences.

The conversion experiences reported by the participants in this study did not follow any of the above three examples; rather, the participants claimed that even though their conversion experience was decisive and abrupt, occurring at the time they gave their lives to Jesus, they had been prepared over a long period for the experience by their families and through their attendance at church programmes and Christian events. In addition, none of the participants claimed that their conversion experience was based on the miracles they witnessed, even though it is possible that many of them would have been following their parents to the bi-annual

convention programme, organised by the RCCG, called the Festival of Life. This programme normally takes place at the Excel, London. During the convention, people often witness many miracles performed by the General Overseer (GO) of the RCCG. The participants claimed that their conversion came about rather through conviction bestowed by the Holy Spirit. Arguably, it is possible for people to attend churches or places of worship for years, due to their connectedness to the place, whether because their parents are members or friends invited them, before they have a personal encounter with faith. Additionally, it is possible for conversion to take place without involving visions or miracles. Many people have reported witnessing a conversion through preaching or study of the Bible as the power of conviction comes on individuals, leading to the acceptance of Jesus Christ, as illustrated by the participants in this study. The most important thing is that the conversion experience must lead to a change in the lives of the believers (Robbins, 2004; Paloutzian, Richardson, & Rambo, 1999). Arguably, conversion can be defined by the extent of the changes that it produces in the personality or the practice of the individual (Paloutzian, Richardson, & Rambo, 1999).

In addition, the description of conversion in this study is consistent with that of Paloutzian, Richardson, and Rambo (1999). Paloutzian, Richardson, and Rambo, in their investigation of conversion and de-conversion (leaving the church) experiences, used three levels of personality assessment. They found that there was little personality change in terms of basic personality features during conversion or de-conversion. Nonetheless, their findings showed that there is a significant change in the attitudes, emotions and behaviour of the converts. They also reported that conversion or de-conversion result in a massive change in terms of purpose in life, meaning, and the psychological wellbeing of their participants. The research also revealed that their participants claimed that they experienced a change of attitude towards life in general, including their values, decisions and feeling of purpose because of their conversion experience.

In this study, conversion is an experience that occurs with the acceptance of Jesus Christ into one's life. As mentioned earlier, this is also known as being born again in many Pentecostal churches, including the Redeemed Christian Church of God (RCCG). The RCCG, like many other Pentecostal denominations, espouses the notion that salvation can only come through belief in Jesus Christ, which involves conscious confession and the repudiation of one's sin as well as the declaration that Jesus is the Lord. It is widely believed among Christians, particularly Pentecostal Christians, that at conversion, the Holy Spirit comes to dwell in the life of the believer. However, the RCCG as a denomination also teaches that the Holy Spirit can leave a believer who sins. Hence, the emphasis is on holy living. The study shows that the participants who described their religious experience in relation to their conversion often did so in agreement with the doctrine of the RCCG on the subject matter. For example, while recounting his conversion experience, Antony (13) said, "someone who says 'I am a Christian' means that they accepted Jesus [into their lives], and they want to go to church and pray to Him [God] when they go." Meanwhile, Oscar (13) elaborated on Anthony's statement by saying: "Now that I am saved by Jesus Christ our Lord and personal saviour, I have a spiritual relationship with Him [God]. I can call on Him at any time."

According to Anthony and Oscar, in order for someone to be recognised as a Christian, he or she must have been saved through the acceptance of Jesus Christ as Lord and personal saviour. Additionally, the person must have a relationship with God, which comes through personal prayer, Bible reading, and the attendance of church programmes. Invariably, from the perspective of the speakers, anyone who does not accept Jesus as Lord and personal saviour is not considered a Christian. Oscar also noted that the only way to have a relationship with God is through this embrace of Jesus. According to Natalia (15), the conversion experience does not equate with going to the church because there are people who attend church regularly but

have not experienced a personal connection with God. As Natalia puts it, there are people who attend church programmes because "they want to meet wives or meet husbands or 'I like this top, let me wear it to church'." In addition, Natalia expressed the view that someone who is a Christian by conversion will "actually want to go to church to worship God… regardless of anything." In other words, the conversion experience serves as motivation for some people to go to church without hesitation regardless of whether it is conducive or not. Speaking about her own conversion experience, Natalia said, "I come to church to worship God. Know Him for myself, just give Him worship for He actually deserves it, and He is my personal saviour." Having personal knowledge about Jesus as saviour is one of the important teachings in the RCCG denomination. It is the belief of the RCCG that salvation, which is the same as conversion, cannot be transferred from one person to another, such as the parents to their children; rather, it is a gift of God to anyone who professes Jesus as Lord and saviour on a personal level. This may be different in some other denominations, such as Anglican and Roman Catholic. Having discussed the conversion experience, the next section discusses the personal or individual experiences of prayer and Bible study.

10.2 Prayers

After acknowledging that the conversion experience serves as the foundational stone of their Christian living, the participants also admitted that prayer is an important part of their lives. Some of the participants, including Grace (15), Georgina (15), and Moses (15), amongst others, described their religious and spiritual experiences in terms of their commitment to praying. According to these participants, while conversion is important to being a Christian, it is also important that one is committed to the faith personally. This commitment is demonstrated through the believer's attachment to praying and reading the Bible. For instance, speaking about prayer, Grace said:

> I pray every day. I pray when I wake up, and throughout the day, I say a little prayer; and when I am ready to sleep, I also pray. We also have a family altar [prayer meeting] every night, and also pray during the prayer meeting in the church, and during corporate prayer when we go to church.

Similarly, Georgina (15) declared:

> I pray every day. It depends, like from school [during school], I always pray in the morning, and in closing, I also pray. Erm, I pray to talk to God and to thank Him for all that He has done for me, and I also pray concerning any problem that I might have, like in school. So, I pray concerning my exams. So, I pray every day for different kinds of stuff.

Additionally, Rejoice (13), after declaring that she prays every day, justified this by saying:

> Because I know that prayer is a really powerful thing, that God is always listening, [He] is always willing to listen to us and we can't always expect our prayer to be answered because God knows why he does not answer us, especially if it's going to take us away from Him.

While Rejoice attested that prayer is important and that she prays all the time, she also added a caveat that I think is very significant. She maintained that even though God may not answer all prayers, it is not because He does not love us, or because He simply does not want to answer, but because He knows what is best for us. According to Rejoice, God knows what we can handle and He will not allow us to have something that will eventually lead us away from following His commandments. This is not to say that it is the same in all cases, because it is also possible for someone, as the result of an unanswered prayer, to depart from following God's commandments.

Still speaking about her personal experience in terms of prayer, Grace (15) said:

> …. I pray about health, protection, provision, studies. Erm, I pray to get closer to God. I pray about what I read from the Bible. I pray for family, church members and the choir. [The participant is a member of her church choir.]

Grace further recounted her prayer practice by saying:

> When it was time for me to choose options for my GCSE, I don't know which ones to choose. I don't know which ones [GCSE subjects] I could [do] and like as well. But I prayed about it and then the ones I chose, I felt were the best I could have chosen because I am excelling in them at the moment. Because I am able to be studying the subjects I enjoy, which helps me… because I like the subjects, and when it comes to

> revision for my actual GCSE, I will enjoy revising the subjects because it will be interesting to me. I think it will help me to get higher grades.

Grace described the power of prayer in making the right choices, including the mundane choice of subjects to study for the GCSE. According to her, because she had prayed before selecting her subjects, she found it interesting to study those subjects, and she thought that will help her with her final GCSE scores.

The claim of the participants in this study in relation to their feeling of assurance that God answers prayers is consistent with the study of Boczkowska and Zięba (2016), whose research participants claimed that they experienced the presence of God or the protection of God as they pray. The findings in this present study reveal that the participants believe in the efficacy of prayer, and this is demonstrated through their assertions that God hears and answers prayers. Some of the participants cited different periods when they had to pray and how they have received what they prayed for. To them, this indicates that God is present with them in all circumstances of life. Although a few of them claimed that God could seem to be far away sometimes, especially, when it seems their prayers are not answered. However, there is no evidence to show that a prayer going unanswered had a negative effect on the participants' perceptions or experiences.

The findings reveal that the majority of the interview participants are committed to praying on a personal level. Many of the participants indicated that they pray regularly, while a few said they prayed only on special occasions, such as when they are about to take an examination or when they need help from God with a certain issue or decision. However, the findings revealed that all the participants believe in the efficacy of prayer, and that God answers prayers. Prayer is an important aspect of worship in the RCCG, and it is encouraged in every section of the

Church. Prayer is not just for adults or during communal services, but is encouraged among children and teenagers as well, and in private.

While the communal prayers are very important in the Church, individual personal prayers are also encouraged. The importance placed on prayer in the RCCG is demonstrated through the way prayer points are sent out to a WhatsApp group chat, to individual phones, or other internet devices, so that everyone can participate in prayers on a personal basis. Furthermore, the Open Heaven, a devotional booklet published by the RCCG, and used in most RCCG families, has a prayer section which anyone using the manual is expected to use to pray at the end of devotional studies. Personal prayer is also encouraged during communal services. At a certain point, prayer points will be read out while time is given for individuals to personally say those prayers before another set is read out again. Most of the prayer points in the RCCG centre on success and prosperity, destroying the power of enemies, including Satan, and on health and wellbeing. These prayers are derived from different parts of the Bible, whether through eisegesis (quoting the Bible out of context by neglecting its historical contexts) or exegesis (quoting the Bible in line with the historical context). Arguably, eisegesis is a common practice among the New Pentecostal churches, particularly the ones that originated in Africa (Gifford, 1994). People are encouraged to pray aloud during communal services, and this sometimes leads to people shouting and speaking in tongues as they pray.

In addition, every member of the RCCG is encouraged to take part in the annual prayer and fasting sessions. These normally take place between the months of January and March, with the duration varying between forty and one hundred days, depending on the declaration of the General Overseer (GO), pastor Adeboye, who would normally say he is acting on directions from the Lord. Spiritual awakening and repentance from sins mark this session. It is also a

period of seeking the face of God on behalf of the participants' country of birth and the United Kingdom. Although these prayer and fasting sessions are not made compulsory, many, including children and teenagers, often participate unless there is a health issue. While it might be possible for some parents to coerce their children into taking part in the series of prayer and fasting sessions as practised in the RCCG, this study has not found any evidence that the participants have been forced to take part in these practices. Rather, the findings show that the participants willingly engage in prayer at times of their convenience.

The importance placed on prayer by the members of the RCCG, including the teenagers in this study, could be traced to the origins of the Church (see chapter 5 of this thesis for details). The founder of the RCCG (Josiah Akindayo) was originally a member of an Anglican missionary society before joining the Cherubim and Seraphim Church, which was known at its early inception as "Ijo Aladura" in Yoruba. This means "Possessors of Prayer church" (Adeboye, 2007; Burgess, Knibbe, & Quaas, 2010; Harris, 2006; Ray, 1993). Burgess, Knibbe, and Quaas (2010) noted that Akindayo rose to the position of a prophet, which is the highest position at the Cherubim and Seraphim church, before leaving the church in 1947 to establish the RCCG. It is likely that the prayer pattern and practice in the Cherubim and Seraphim were carried over to the newly established RCCG. Arguably, this practice of prayer continues in the RCCG denomination even today, wherever the Church is established.

Arguably, the experience of prayer is not unique to the Pentecostal Movement, as studies (e.g. Francis & Evans, 2001; Hood, Hill, & Spilka, 2009) have revealed that prayer is important to many people, whether Christian or not. Also, prayer has been found to be multidimensional, and different types of prayer relate to different aspects of health and wellbeing. For example, Hood, Hill, and Spilka (2009) and Poloma and Pendleton (1989) revealed that 'meditative' or

contemplative' (non-petitionary) prayer has a close association with religious satisfaction and existential wellbeing. Hood, Hill, and Spilka further argue that colloquial (conversational, day-to-day) prayer alone has no negative effect on believers, whereas a ritual (repetitive) form of prayer alone did have a negative effect on believers. This is why Hood, Hill, and Spilka (2009), and Poloma and Pendleton (1989) declared that the nature and type of prayer, and not just the frequency, determine the experiential consequences. This study's findings on the regularity of prayer are consistent with the research of Smith, Melinda and Denton (2003), carried out in America. As in this study, Smith, Melinda and Denton noted that the frequency of their participants' prayers varied from one to another. The report of Smith, Melinda and Denton showed that about forty percent of their participants claimed to pray on a daily basis, while twenty-two percent claimed that they pray weekly. Another nine percent stated that they pray once a month or less (p. 118). Having discussed the religious and spiritual experiences of the participants in terms of praying, the next section discusses the religious and spiritual experience of studying the Bible.

10.3 Bible study

This study revealed that the participants engage in personal study of the Bible. While some reported that they use reading aids, such as devotional books or online materials, others said they just open the Bible to any book and read. For example, speaking about his religious and spiritual experience in a personal way through Bible reading, Moses (15) said:

> I read the Bible. I have this devotional. Sometimes I read my devotional. It teaches you everything you need to know about being a modern Christian, a modern Pentecostal Christian, and how to overcome things. So, sometimes I read my devotional, sometimes I read my Bible.

Although there are various Christian devotionals that are published by Christian organisations all over the world, to aid Christians in their walk with God and study of the Bible, the devotional that Moses was talking about here is called *Open Heaven*. This devotional booklet is published

in Nigeria by the RCCG Publication Department. It is expected that every member, particularly families in the RCCG, will purchase this booklet to aid their daily Bible study and prayer. This booklet deals with both Biblical and doctrinal teachings of the Church. Although it is not compulsory for all members of the Church to purchase this booklet, the majority of the members of the RCCG have at least one copy of it at home. Even though Moses claimed not to substitute this booklet for Bible reading, he reported that he finds it useful to read from the booklet as an alternative when he is not able to read the Bible.

Another participant, Georgina (15) said, "I study the Bible, yeah, sometimes, like during the time when I was doing my mock exams or tests; that's the time when I study the Bible more, or sometimes when I'm bored, or when I feel like I need to." Meanwhile, Mary (13) affirmed, "Sometime, I just type it [a Biblical passage] up on the internet and look for example, if I am praying over something, I will just read about it from there."

As indicated from the above excerpts, the findings revealed that the frequency of engagement in Bible study among the participants varies from one person to another, just like prayer. Although research on the way teenagers engage with personal Bible study is limited, it is possible to infer that the curious nature of teenagers contributes to the way they undertake personal study of the Bible (Santrock, 2005). Kim and Esquivel (2011) reveal that children are able to assign meaning to religious and spiritual experiences as they develop greater cognitive and meta–cognitive capacity for reflection and a better understanding of abstract things (p. 756). Arguably, during the teenage period, children have a greater capacity to think abstractly and search for meaning (Kim and Esquivel, 2011), including the meaning of what they have been taught about religion and spirituality. This is why teenage or adolescence has been identified as a period of 'spiritual awakening' by theologians and psychologists. Invariably,

during this period, teenagers find meaning for themselves, improve their spiritual experiences, and if need be, challenge traditional religious beliefs (Fowler, 1981; Good & Willoughby, 2008; Groeschel, 1983). As Kim and Esquivel (2011) noted, the experimental search of teenagers allows them to internalise "self-adopted spiritual and religious" (p. 756) beliefs.

Nonetheless, one participant, Joseph, proffered a different experience of dealing with religion and spirituality in a personal way. According to him, "I don't really read the Bible personally, but as a family, we do occasionally, especially on Sunday night, before we go to bed." Joseph's profession here is an indication that not all teenagers have time to study the Bible on a private basis as it is possible that some still depend on their family to provide the guidance they need in relation to studying the Bible. All the participants, except a few, agreed that they enjoy parental guidance in studying the Bible, particularly when it comes to the interpretation of certain parts of the Bible. Having discussed the religious and spiritual experiences of the participants regarding Bible study, the next section discusses religious and spiritual experience through communal involvement.

10.4 Communal involvement

As in the case of conversion, praying, and Bible study, the participants of this study believe that communal involvement is an important aspect of their Christian lives. Such involvement includes fellowship with one's family members, which is normally called family altar, as well as fellowship with other church members, both on and off the church premises. It also includes carrying out civic tasks in the community in the name of the church. All these activities are regarded as important aspects of the Christian experience, which the participants reported helped them nurture their relationship with God. The study reveals that communal experiences, such as the attendance of church services or church-organised community programmes, are an

important aspect of religious experience because they foster a sense of belonging and community for these teenagers, thereby reducing the risk of engaging in detrimental behaviours. This is consistent with the extant literature, which shows that, amongst teenagers, the communal experience of attending church results in positive civic involvement and positive religious practices (Burgess, Knibbe, & Quaas, 2010; Francis, 2001; Freeman, 1986). For example, Freeman (1986) maintained that regular church attendance reduces idleness among teenagers. Arguably, many teenagers engage in risky behaviours as a result of idleness. Communal involvement in the place of worship can fill any vacancy that might have been created from idleness. Details of the importance of communal involvement or church attendance are given in the sections on the perception and influence of church attendance. In the meantime, all the participants mentioned that attending church programmes is important in their lives in different ways. This study also found that the teenagers who attend church regularly maintain that they frequently read the Bible and pray, more so than those who attend church less frequently. This study does not in any way suggest that someone who does not attend church services regularly is not a Christian or could not experience conversion or individual ways of relating to God through praying and Bible study. What it reveals, rather, is that church attendance helps the conversion process and engagement with prayers and Bible study. The next section summarises the salient points discussed in this chapter.

10.5 Chapter summary

This chapter has argued that religious and spiritual experiences are important to teenagers, particularly the participants in this study. The chapter maintains that the religious experiences of conversion, praying, Bible study, and communal involvement are important to the black churchgoing teenagers who participated in this study. The findings of this study have been linked to extant literature on the subject matter. It is therefore concluded that religious and

spiritual experience is very important to the way the black teenagers relate with religion and spirituality. Even though every aspect of religious and spiritual experience is unique and personal, most of the time, it has been argued that it is also subject to interpretation. Arguably, experience without interpretation will lack religious meaning, because the interpretation of a religious and spiritual experience is important if a meaningful structure is to be achieved (Hood, Hill, & Williamson, 2005).

This study has also shown that the aspects of religious and spiritual experience discussed in this chapter are not mutually exclusive, but are interconnected. That is to say, after conversion, believers are expected to personally engage in praying and studying the Bible. They are also expected to attend corporate religious programmes, whether within the family circle, church community or church organised civic programmes. It has been revealed that for some participants, prayers and Bible study are carried out both as personal and corporate practices in conjunction with other people, such as family members and at church; while for others, they are more corporate than personal. Having discussed the religious and spiritual experiences of the participants in this chapter, the next chapter discusses the influence of social contexts on religion and spirituality.

Chapter Eleven: The Influence of Society on Religion and Spirituality

11.0 Chapter introduction

The aim of this chapter is to present and discuss the findings on the influence of society on the religion and spirituality of the participants of this study. The discussion about this topic is important because it reveals that the rapidly changing society affects the way the participants relate with religion and spirituality. Although many studies have been conducted on the influence of social contexts on the religion and spirituality of teenagers, research on the influence of society as a whole is limited. Hence, these findings help fill this gap. Although different aspects of society could influence religion and spirituality, the particular factors discussed in this chapter include societal principles, social media and technology, and music. For each of these factors, the participants' accounts of their influence on religion and spirituality are narrated and then examined in light of previous research. While the influence of society on religion and spirituality of teenagers may be wide-ranging and vary from one person to another, the effects discussed in this chapter are limited to those caused by the factors listed above. In addition, the influence of fashion on the religion and spirituality of the participants is discussed at the end of this chapter. This topic was not covered by the original research or interview questions, but is discussed here because it unveils another area of societal influence on religion and spirituality, which might have been overlooked by prior researchers.

The opinions of the participants of this study varied regarding the influence of society on their religion and spirituality. The participants reported that the extent of the influence of the wider society depends on the individual person, and this influence can be either positive or negative. The influence of society, as discussed in this study, is in agreement with the extant literature (e.g. Ashworth & Farthing, 2007; Brierley, 2005; Perman, 1977), which revealed that changes in society have contributed to a general lack of interest in religion and spirituality among

residents of the United Kingdom. However, little attention has been paid to detailing the influence of society among churchgoing teenagers. Although this study does not claim to discuss all the influences of society on the religion and spirituality of teenagers, it is hoped that it will open a new chapter in the academic discussion of the topic.

11.1 The influence of societal principles

This study's participants maintained that the values held by British society have changed substantially in modern times in comparison to the times of old. It is assumed that many of these values are imposed on everyone, including black Christian teenagers, without consideration to their personal or religious beliefs. This, in turn, affects the way they relate with religion and spirituality. These principles include attitudes towards homosexuality and premarital sex, social status, lack of belief in God, peer pressure, bullying, and others. Numerous studies, such as Francis (2001, 2013), Gallup and Bezilla (1992), Smith and Denton (2005) and Vincett *et al*. (2012), have been conducted both in the USA and in the United Kingdom on the influence of religion and spirituality on teenagers. These studies have found that religion and spirituality help steer teenagers away from crime and juvenile delinquency, yet research on the influence of society on the religion and the spirituality of teenagers is limited. This is one of the gaps that this study is set to fill.

All the participants in this study agreed that societal principles affect their religion and spirituality, and that this influence is mostly negative. Many things, which the contemporary society adores, but the church abhors, compete for the attention of these teenagers, and this makes it difficult for them to concentrate on developing their religious and spiritual life. For example, the aforementioned attitudes and values, such as the rights of gays and lesbians, premarital sex, social status, and lack of belief in God, make it difficult for many Christian

teenagers, like the participants in this study, to maintain their religion and spirituality. According to the participants, some of these principles and values, which are promoted in this country in the name of equality, are contrary to the teachings of the church.

Generally, Rejoice (13) commented:

> Erm, I think society can influence us [black teenagers] in both good and bad [ways]. But, speaking about bad aspects, I think it really changes a Christian's mind-set, especially because you are surrounded by things that will be classed as ungodly. You are surrounded by them for most of your life because, as the society is going on now, things that we [Christians] deem not acceptable are now acceptable. S o, I think it really changes how a Christian thinks.

Lucy (13) similarly acknowledged that society has a negative influence on the religion and the spirituality of teenagers like her. She expressed the view that it is frequently a struggle for teenagers to maintain their Christianity in the face of pressures from the wider society. This is how she illustrated her point:

> It's so hard to maintain your Christianity while you are trying to balance things like social status, peer pressure, you know, people are getting bullied; and you know when you are in a society where everyone around you is doing the wrong thing; [it] is so hard to speak out and do the right thing; especially, when there are so many people contradicting your point, saying there is no proof, there is no tangible proof that God is real, especially for people of our age [teenagers]. When you are trying to tell them to believe in something they can't see, it makes no sense what you are trying to tell people, [because] there is no concrete proof that He is there. So, it's hard because a lot of people have made up their minds that [it] is easier to live without God.

When Lucy was questioned further on what she meant by 'the wrong thing', she said:

> Erm, I believe that the society is ruled a lot by people's beliefs. Erm, people who don't believe in God have their beliefs, and that is what rules them; that is what causes them to do what they want. People that are ruled by money, by their jobs, that is why they neglect, I don't know, their children. The society, I don't think a lot of people realise that, is based on beliefs. [The] belief that money is the root of all happiness is what causes someone, instead of looking out for their children, [to] go and look for money. You know, [it] is what causes people to commit crimes because they want money. This society is ruled by what we believe in; it is ruled by what we see as our main priority.

From the perspective of Lucy and those who share her opinion, teenagers are likely to find it difficult to maintain their religion and spirituality in a society where social status, peer pressure, and contradictory opinions and beliefs, are competing for their attention and effort.

Furthermore, the parents, who are supposed to serve as guardians for these teenagers, are not always available because of the pressure they face to provide the basic necessities of life for the family, or because they prioritise, as Lucy puts it, career and money over their children, thinking that material things can bring happiness to their family. Lucy described this mentality as wrong, because for these teenagers, nothing can replace the time that their parents spend with them during these years.

Arguably, the prevailing teachings about sexuality and other values contrary to religion, coupled with the nature of teenagers, which is associated with the questioning of everything, including religion and cultural values, makes them susceptible to different kinds of philosophies and teachings within the society (Brierley, 2005). This is because, in an attempt to live a life that is acceptable to the wider society, teenagers may not hesitate to try out different things, including abandoning religious beliefs or changing their religion (Brierley, 2005). Furthermore, the findings of this study show that individualism, which is promoted in contemporary British society, is having an impact on the religion and spirituality of teenagers. This is because the contemporary British society no longer values family bonds, which was once the practice in the UK. For instance, the observation of the sacredness of Sunday as a day of rest, family bonding and togetherness, where values and beliefs are shared over special meals and passed down from one generation to another, has largely fallen away. Instead, individualism has become the order of the day. People are no longer interested in observing Sunday as a day of rest; shops, which in the past had always closed on Sundays, now open until late in the night, and many people now go to work on Sundays. Arguably, the individualistic nature of the society has resulted in teenagers developing greater interest in social media and technology. Many people, including teenagers, spend most of their time watching TV or surfing social media, where religious programmes are very few. Rather, films, movies, music, and

magazines, which promote outward beauty, fashion, social status, celebrities and putting models, above modesty, by and large, have become the order of the day (Perman, 1977).

Additionally, Precious (14) mentioned that the influence, which she called 'distractions', of society on the religion and spirituality of female teenagers, can be different from their male counterparts. According to her:

> There're so many distractions in the society, especially if you're a girl, for example, social media, boyfriends, exams, parents, peer pressure, parties. And if you're a boy, you have to like, impress other people; and some boys focus on stereotypical stuff like sports and football, but you could get laughed at if you don't like other things. But parents might not see that, because when they were teenagers, it was easier for them, because in Africa, it's just like one thing. But then when you actually come to Europe and UK [because the participant had lived in Spain before moving to England], it's actually hard, really hard [to maintain your religion and spirituality], especially when you're black… to be yourself. Like, with the white people, their parents are not strict, so they can do whatever they want and then you see us [black teenagers], it is actually harder for us [because our parents are strict].

Elaborating on her earlier statement, Rejoice (13) asserted that the teachings that black teenagers receive at home stand in contrast to the reality they face in society. According to her, "What they teach us at home, what they put in place for us, is very different from what we see in the society." For this study's participants, these contradictory messages make it hard for black teenagers to relate well with religion and spirituality.

Lucy lamented that societal influences have led some black teenagers to compromise and

> shed their image [African image]. They don't want to be known as a Nigerian person or African person, which is why a lot of people, they try to speak differently… I have seen a lot of African people [teenagers], who are trying to conform to the British standard, instead of trying to be who they are, and what they've been taught at home. [As for me], I try my best to be who I am, you know, there's a part of me that's British and a lot of people could not even believe that I've lived in Nigeria at all because of my accent. So, I'll say that I have adapted to the British way, but that doesn't change the African that I am inside.

Lucy acknowledged that she tried her best to be herself, yet she admitted it was not an easy task, as she has imbibed some of the culture of her adopted country, including the accent as

well as some principles. Nevertheless, she maintained that the 'African-ness' in her often shows itself, because that is who she truly is. This concept of African-ness as mentioned by Lucy relates to identity, which is beyond the scope of this research.

Specifically regarding homosexuality, Joseph (14) stated, "Well, the way the society is changing. Like, for example, being gay- they say is right. So, that will affect your spirituality because, it is what everyone is doing now, so you think it's right but it's not right." Grace (15) was another participant who took a strong stand on homosexuality. According to her:

> I think homosexuality is wrong because God made Adam and Eve, and Eve was made out of Adam's rib, showing that God made woman for man; and having two men or two women is not the way God made the world, and it's just, like, being lustful. There is no real reason for a man and a man or a woman and a woman to be together because they cannot make children and cannot get married in God's eyes. So, I don't think there is any use for it and there is no biological need for it apart from lust. Yet they teach us in the school that it is acceptable. When you speak against it, they say you are homophobic and discriminative.

Thus, according to the participants, the societal principles are imposed on the teenagers through the teachings of their schools, without any consideration for the beliefs and values that these teenagers hold. Any different opinion about homosexuality is derided as homophobic, while the schools, which ostensibly discourage casual sex, at the same time, hand out condoms to students (Gibbs, 1993).

The findings on the influence of societal principles on teenagers are consistent with the studies of Burkett and Warren (1987), and Steinman and Zimmerman (2004), which revealed that there is a likelihood that risky behaviours in society may influence the way teenagers relate with religion and spirituality, despite the evidence that religion and spirituality, in particular, church attendance, serve as deterrents to such risky behaviours (Francis, 2001, 2013).

This study corroborates many aspects of previous studies on the influence of religion and spirituality on teenagers (Brown, 1985; Barnes, Farrell, & Banerjee, 1994; Amey, Albrecht, & Miller, 1996). For instance, many studies have uncovered a negative relationship between religion and spirituality and risky behaviour among teenagers, such as premarital sexual experiences (Brown, 1985), the consumption of alcohol (Barnes, Farrell, & Banerjee, 1994), and smoking (Amey, Albrecht, & Miller, 1996). Others, such as Steinman and Zimmerman (2004), who carried out their study among teenagers in America, similarly found that African American teenagers who engage more in religious activities are less likely to be involved in anti-social or dangerous behaviours, such as crime, casual sexual intercourse, drinking alcohol, or smoking cigarettes or marijuana. Arguably, this is because religion reduces the likelihood of adolescents engaging in premarital sex by influencing their attitudes and beliefs positively about sexual activity (National Institutes of Health, 2003) and insulates them against criminal and anti-social behaviour (Evans *et al*., 1995).

The interview findings in this study also reveal that the promotion of lack of belief in God is another societal principle that has a negative influence on the religion and spirituality of teenagers. For example, the participants argued that the changes in society as regards belief in God have made it difficult for them to maintain their religion and spirituality because many people are just doing what they like without any guiding principles to follow or regard for other people's religious beliefs about God. They stated that even those who know the right thing to do are afraid of speaking out for fear of being labelled as narrow-minded or worse, or even accused of infringing the freedom of others. One of the participants (Lucy) stated that preaching or speaking about God to other people, particularly as a Christian, is becoming harder because of the lack of a basic understanding about God or Christian faith among many people, even though England was once a Christian nation. Arguably, the society has turned into a place

where observable, measurable and validated proof are solicited to justify belief in God, and anything short of that is seen as delusion or ambitious thinking.

Nevertheless, despite the influence of society on the interview participants, many of them claim that they are still able to maintain a strong stand on some issues. For instance, they claimed that homosexuality is not good because, as Christians, God condemns it. They also maintain that premarital sex is bad, not just because it is forbidden in the Bible, but because of the adverse effect it could have on the health and wellbeing of teenagers. Additionally, they all condemned the use of addictive substances, such as drugs or cigarettes. While they agreed that it is important to earn a living, they reject placing career above the wellbeing of the family, particularly the children. The study shows that there is no unanimous opinion on the issue of alcohol consumption. For instance, while many condemned drinking alcohol completely, a few took a flexible approach to it, claiming that it could be permitted if consumed sensibly and in a small quantity.

The findings in this study are in agreement with the study of Hunt and Lightly (2001), who argued that the stern viewpoint held against attitudes prevalent in contemporary British society, particularly regarding premarital sex, homosexuality, or prioritising family over career, to mention but a few, is not in isolation of the RCCG teachings and doctrines. For instance, the study they carried out among members of the RCCG (the same context as this study) in London, revealed that the RCCG as a denomination expects strict personal morals for its members, including teenagers, through its teachings on moral values. It has zero tolerance for "lying, cheating, stealing, quarrelling, gossiping, bribing, consuming alcohol, smoking, [and] fornicating" (p. 117). Many of the major doctrines of the RCCG denomination are connected with the integrity of the family, sexuality, wealth, social justice, health and wellbeing, and

purity (Hunt & Lightly, 2001). Hunt and Lightly argue that the practice of purity adopted by the RCCG in the United Kingdom is not a new thing, rather it dates to the inception of the denomination in Nigeria, where it served as a symbolic way of separating the members of the RCCG from the moral pandemonium of Nigerian society. It is believed that this same principle is implemented everywhere the RCCG denomination is located, including Leicester, the context of this study. The next section presents the findings and discussion on social media and how it affects the participants.

11.2 The influence of social media

The influence of social media cannot be over emphasised in a society like the UK, where everyone is immersed in technology and social media (e.g. the internet, mobile phones, Facebook, Snapchat, and so on). This influence cuts across every aspect of people's lives, regardless of age, social status, skin colour or orientation. Media, whether social or mass, are the means through which a message is communicated within a specific social context. However, social and mass media have now permeated every culture and society as a result of the proliferation of technological devices. This influence includes the effect on religion and spirituality. The use of media has now accelerated, particularly in developed countries, like England. Mass media started to have a role in religion when it became an important source of information dissemination among the Pentecostal churches. Both mass and social media have since become an important, if not the sole platform, by which religious experiences and beliefs are circulated (Hjarvard, 2011). Arguably, having taken over the cultural and social functions of institutional religions, media now "provide spiritual guidance, moral orientation, ritual passages and a sense of community and belonging" (Hjarvard, 2011, p. 124), which were the original responsibilities of the institutional religions. In addition, the development and expansion of social media as a result of the mass production of high-tech devices, contributes

to the influence of media on religion and spirituality. While many of the participants in previous studies have described their experience of social media as positive, a few have also recounted the negative impact of social media on their lives.

In this section, the influence of social media is limited to the religion and spirituality of the participants in this study. Some of the social media and technologies frequently used by the participants in this study are: computers/laptops, the Internet, game consoles, smart phones, TV, email, Facebook, Instagram, Periscope, Snapchat, Twitter, WhatsApp, and YouTube. All the participants of this study confirmed that they have at least one gadget through which they access social media websites. A full list of these devices is provided with participants' demography in Appendix D.

The participants acknowledged the influence of social media on the way they relate with religion and spirituality. While some of the participants argued that social media has a positive influence on their religious beliefs and practices, the majority reported a negative influence. The amount of time that the participants reported spending on social media differed from one to another. Yet they all agreed that the use of social media affects their religion and spirituality, both directly and indirectly, as they do every aspect of the participants' daily lives. They also acknowledged that the influence of social media depends on the site or programme they subscribe to or engage with.

Joseph (14) described the influence of social media thus:

> It depends on what you see on the media, and who you follow, like on Twitter, you can follow an account that tweets Bible quiz, and that can have [a] good effect on you, but if you are following someone who is doing something bad, then that will have a negative effect on you as well.

Concurring with Joseph, Georgina (15) said:

> Hum, I guess it [social media] can be good and bad. Good that you could have a Bible App and have Bible verses each day, which you can look through. And bad, as it can be a big distraction, especially when you go to the Bible study; you can be on your phone, go on Facebook, do whatever stuff [while the Bible study is in progress]. It can also distract you from doing stuff and you can procrastinate a lot.

Anthony (13), on the other hand, argued: "It [Social Media] cannot have a negative influence on you when you know what to use it for and when you [are] suppose[d] to use it." Thus, the discussion on the influence of social media in this study is divided into positive and negative influence.

11.2.1 Positive influence of social media

The interview participants who stated that social media has a positive influence on their religion and spirituality maintain that they use social media as a platform for evangelism. They claim that they speak to people who follow them on social media sites about God, including total strangers, an opportunity they claimed might not be available elsewhere. The participants also reported that, through social media, they are able to subscribe to and follow popular preachers and gospel artists. Grace (15) argued that:

> Apart from the fact that it takes away my time to do other stuff, I think a social media, like Instagram, that I follow, has a lot of, like, Bible pages; and I follow lots of inspirational Christian people. So, I believe they [social media inspirational writers and speakers] put up encouraging words or things that they learnt during their prayer times, or during their quiet time, that are really encouraging, and stuff that I would not have thought of before.

Thus, social media provide the opportunity for them to listen to sermons and inspirational messages delivered by popular preachers, thereby enhancing their religious and spiritual growth. They also claimed that social media improved the way they study the Bible and pray; since there are applications for this that are readily available on social networks. Therefore, they do not need to be in a particular place to study the Bible or communicate with God, both practices which they consider to be essential to their religious and spiritual experience as teenage Christians. Angie (13) said, "Positively, it [social media] does influence me, because

on Instagram and Snapchat, erm, I follow this page, which gives you little quotes about the Bible. So, you can base your page on that [Bible App] and people you follow on that [Biblical inspiration] as well." In addition, the study also shows that social media provide an avenue through which the teenagers can share their religious and spiritual experiences, including their struggles, within a context that is familiar to them, and they will not be afraid of being judged by adults or spiritually mature people because they are anonymous to many of the people they speak to. Another aspect of social media mentioned is the prayer points, which are posted on social networks. As some of these teenagers claimed they struggle with personal prayers, having readymade prayers, which they can just read and pray, enables them to communicate with God and encourages their faith. Lucy (13) stated that:

> Erm, I don't think there is anything wrong with social media if you use it for the right purpose. You know, maybe share something about God or read prayers from there. Everyone sometimes, share a quote to make someone smile. Social media isn't bad, [it] is what it's used for that's bad. So I think social media would have started with pure intention and has been turned… into something that it really shouldn't be.

Joy (13) concurred, saying: "I think it [using social media] is fine up to [a] certain stage. What I mean is that it's okay to use them [social media devices] to contact people that you cannot easily go out and meet [e.g. people in other countries, like Nigeria]; and you are able to contact on certain important things." This indicates that, apart from religion, the participants also use social media to keep in touch with relatives and friends in Nigeria, thereby fostering links that affirm the African and Christian aspects of their identities, which are essential to African immigrants in any nation.

The findings on the positive influence of social media, particularly as a means for gospel dissemination among the black teenagers, as recorded in this study, is consistent with the study carried out by Adogame (2010), where it was revealed that social media is a popular way by which many Black Majority Churches (BMCs) promote and cultivate religious

internationalism. This method is what Adogame called alternative evangelistic strategies. Arguably, one of the reasons this type of evangelistic strategy is very useful in Western societies, particularly the UK, is the individualistic nature of the society, as a result of which the conventional methods of evangelism, such as door to door, street to street, marketplace and bus evangelism, which are commonly used in Africa, are less productive, if not impossible. Hence, new methods, such as social media, have been adopted by the Pentecostal churches to disseminate religious programmes and activities and attract new members. Adogame (2010) maintains that diasporas, in this case, African immigrants in England, "are webs, and webs consist not only of fibres and ropes but also of nodes that link them together" (Haller, 2001, p. 7). Adogame claimed that social media, such as the Internet, websites, TV and other interactive technology, are common means of stimulating transnational religious activities amongst the religious leaders of BMCs. Adogame (2007) asserts that social media provide "intra-communal web links [for the BMCs] to different places across the globe" (p. 25) which nurture the "development and maintenance of diasporic identity" (Adogame, 2010, p. 61).

However, the findings in this study reveal that the influence of social media among the members of BMCs, in particular the participants in this study, is more than cultural or racial identity. Arguably, social media encourages personal religious and spiritual growth among the teenagers because the use of social media as a platform for religious and spiritual enhancement is not limited to a particular denomination or race. Christians, particularly teenagers, all over the world, are able to connect with each other through social media to encourage each other and exchange ideas. The next section presents the findings and discussion on the negative influence of social media.

11.2.2 Negative influence of social media

Despite the positive influences of social media on religion and spirituality, as recorded above, this study also found that social media have negative influences on the religion and spirituality of the interview participants. All the participants of this study agreed that the use of social media wastes a lot of time, and that the amount of time spent on social media could be spent on things that are more beneficial, such as studying, reading the Bible, helping at home or volunteering outside the home, assisting others, or even praying. For example, Matthew (14) declared, "Erm, I think it [social media] can take a lot of your time away from your family, and you are not going to really spend a lot of time with people around you in your home." In this way, social media can have a negative impact on personal relationships with family members and friends. This is because it reduces the time available for physical contact and interactions, which are essential for healthy relationships. Similarly, the participants expressed the view that too much dependence on social media can result in a lack of consistency in the relationship between the social media user and God or religious activities. For example, if the time that should have been dedicated to religious and spiritual activities, including prayers, is taken over by social media, it can result in passivity in matters of religion and spirituality, leading to a gradual decline in one's personal relationship with God. Shimon (14) said that social media "can distract you from reading your Bible or school books, and it's very addictive, and you will just be talking about it constantly, instead of [doing] other things."

Thus, some of the ways in which the participants said they waste time on social media include chatting with friends or strangers on WhatsApp or Twitter, browsing photos of celebrities and peers on Instagram, watching movies on TV and/or the internet, browsing on their mobile phones, and playing computer games on game consoles or mobile devices. As mentioned previously, the participants lamented that some of time spent on social media could be used

instead in more profitable ways, such as studying for school, reading the Bible, praying, or engaging in personal development. However, many teenagers spend endless time browsing social media.

Mary (13), in agreement with Shimon, mentioned the danger of social media addiction by saying:

> Most teenagers are very addicted to social media. So, whatever they call the social media, they can get addicted by what they post. So, 'the more you are at it, the more you kind of see the world in a different perspective', and it gets them [teenagers like herself] influenced to change [their] path from God.

Research has shown that addiction to social media can have an adverse effect on every aspect of the addicted teenagers' lives, as it becomes their top priority. For example, it can affect their academic performance, because if the time that is supposed to be spent studying is devoted to social media, the desired grades will not be achieved. It can also negatively affect the health and wellbeing of the addict (Hinduja & Patchin, 2008; Lenhart, 2009). In addition, it leads to the lack of a proper diet if the time that is supposed to be used preparing a balanced meal is spent on social media. It can lead to dependence on fast foods, which may not be very healthy or not eating adequately as a result of body weight consciousness, as promoted in social media (Thompson & Stice, 2001).

Concurring with Mary and the others on how social media can waste time and cause misplaced priorities, Lucy (13) said:

> Erm, I don't pray as often as I think I should just because, like I said, a lot of things get us distracted; shows on the TV, social media, there's lot of things that distract me and before I know it, the time has ran away, and I've gone a whole day without praying. Sometimes, I talk to God in my head, but I think, although that's fine, you should take out time, speak to God. A lot of us say we don't have time, but what we don't realise is that we manage to make time to watch TV, we manage to make time to go on social media.

From the perspective of these interviewees, spending too much time on social media sites and watching television can have a negative impact on their prayers and the time they spend studying the Bible. In another interview, Mary (13) commented that the type of friends one has can lead to social media having a negative influence because many teenagers copy what their friends do online, whether it is 'good' or 'bad.' She said, "If I see that my friend follows something on social media, I'm probably going to follow [the same thing, without considering the negative impact of the programme]."

Similarly, Lucy (13) said:

> A lot of people, on Snapchat, follow celebrities and, for example, Carly Jenner, her latest trend thing is jeans with the part at the back, where your bum is, like, cut out; and I have seen a lot of people doing that, getting their jeans, cutting out the part of the bottom; so when they are walking, you know you can see that part; and I think that affects you because the things you shouldn't be doing, you don't need to do it because one celebrity is doing it on the social media, but because everybody [including your friends] is doing it, and you want to be part of that everybody, you start to do it as a Christian teenager.

In addition, Mercy (13) said:

> Erm, there are things you see on TV, and then you see other people doing around you that even though you have been told not to do it, you feel like doing and like other people around you who you know are doing it, and it will definitely have an impact on the things that you think about.

Still speaking about the dangers of social media, Lucy went on to say:

> I do have social media but I don't go on it as much as other people my age do. Erm, I personally think it's very dangerous. Erm, you do not know who you are talking to, whether you think you know, you really don't. Erm, even if you think he is one of your friends, their accounts can easily be hacked; you have no idea. So, it's [social media] at a point where it's uncontrollable. You can't control it, even if they wanted to ban social media now, it's at a point where it can't be contained. It's too much now and is everywhere; and I think it's like a virus, to be honest, I think, it's like it affects people. Once they get to the point, they forget about everything, they just think [about] social media and spend hours on social media, tweeting, texting, erm, friends, followers, you know. People don't even take face-to-face [phone calls] anymore.

The participants lamented the effects of social media not just on religion and spirituality, but on every aspect of their daily lives. They also expressed the view that engaging with social

media could get out of hand, leading teenagers to a stage where all they think about are their social media accounts and activities, at the expense of everything else they could be doing.

Another negative impact of social media, which may or may not affect religion and spirituality but was deemed important by the participants, is its associated security concerns. This is because it is possible for someone's account to be hacked, as stated above, which can result in another person, including total strangers, obtaining access to a person's online account and perpetrating negative activity against or in the name of the original users. For instance, one of the participants (Angel, 13) narrated how her WhatsApp account was once hacked by someone she did not know, who then used it to bully her. She said it took her a lot of time and courage to open up to her parents and school. The effects of this, according to her, were devastating. She said she became depressed and withdrawn. She also developed a lack of interest in school and social gatherings. Thankfully, she claimed that she has overcome that now, through help from the school and good counsel from her parents, as well as support from the church; the perpetrator, who happened to be from a different school, was apprehended and justice was served.

The anonymity of social media also presents a risk, since it makes it possible for anyone to join an online group and claim to be someone else, without others knowing the truth. One of the participants described the lack of proper security checks on social media as "like a virus" (Lucy, 13) referring to how difficult it can be to contain the people that join some social media groups. Even when one is careful to add only familiar people, strangers can still have access through a third party. As a result, an unwanted stranger can gain access to a well-intentioned platform and negatively influence the religion and spirituality of teenage participants by introducing

false teachings and/or activities. It is also difficult to block permanently someone from a social media platform once the person has been added.

Furthermore, the study also revealed that social media can negatively influence religion and spirituality through wrong doctrinal teachings and unfamiliar religious activities that might be peculiar to certain denominations. Since different church denominations have unique doctrinal statements, which may or may not be familiar to all social media users, involvement in a particular platform may lead to the acceptance of contrary philosophies and teachings, leading to personal and spiritual problems.

This study found that the view of religion on social media and technology is not balanced. Instead, the types of activities propagated on social media normally encourage secularism, not religiosity. For example, the vast majority of TV programmes are dedicated to secular settings, while only a few, if at all, are dedicated to religious themes. Among these few, even fewer target youngsters. The majority of media, including films, music, and even magazines focus on promoting beauty, fashion, money making, pop idols, supermodels and film stars, thereby nurturing a secular worldview. Thus, it is likely that the programmes teenagers watch on TV and social media can have a negative impact on their religion and spirituality.

Since there are limited number of studies on the impact of social media on the religion and spirituality of teenagers, this study recommends that further research be carried out on how social media influences the religion and spirituality of young people, particularly the age bracket that is studied in this research. Having discussed the influence of social media on the religion and spirituality of the participants, the next section presents the findings and discussion on the influence of music.

11.3 The influence of music

The importance of music to human beings cannot be overemphasised. Music is considered as so important that it is referred to by some people as food for the soul. Various studies have been carried out exploring the roles and impact of music in the lives of both adults and teenagers. For example, several studies have been conducted by sociologists on the role of popular music as a cultural phenomenon, a social product, and as an influential aspect of adolescent identity. These have proved that music has the ability to influence behaviour and can be used as a social dialogue to express personal meanings. As argued by Hargreaves and Hargreaves (1967) and Hargreaves and North (1997), social interaction, social institutions, and the social environment shape and can be shaped by musical identities. DeNora (2000, 2003) maintains that contemporary teenagers use music as a tool for world building, as it plays an active part in the way they construct their individual identities (DeNora, 2000). However, despite the importance of music, little is known about the dynamics of its relationship to the religion and spirituality of teenagers because most earlier scholars who explored this relationship carried out their research on the generality of the lives of their participants rather than examining any particular aspect of teenagers' lives.

Significantly, the previous studies have been carried out from a different perspective to this current study in terms of aims, contexts, methodologies, and ages, as many of their investigations are not specific to a particular context or age bracket. For example, Smith and Denton (2005), when investigating the relationship between music and teenagers' religiosity, did not specify any age bracket, religious denomination, or education system of the adolescents they investigated; they only provide a rather broad outline of the religious beliefs of American teenagers and the role of music. This is in contrast to the current study, which focuses on a specific context (black African teenagers), denomination (RCCG), and age bracket (13 to 15

years old). Nevertheless, previous research is notable, as it provides a relevant background to examining the impact of music on teenagers, including some aspects of their religion and spirituality. As Beaudoin (1998) argued, the key to gaining genuine meaning from religion and spirituality is through experience, which many teenagers encounter through music.

The opinions of the participants of this study are quite diverse regarding the influence of music on their religion and spirituality. While some of them admitted that music can negatively influence religion and spirituality, others suggested that music can also have a positive effect. All the participants agreed that this influence depends on the type of music the teenager listens to. Mercy (13), one of the participants of this study, expressed the opinion that music is so powerful that it can affect the way teenagers think. According to her:

> When you are listening to music, the things that they say in the song, they can, like, go into your head unconsciously. While you are listening to the music, you can just be thinking it [the lyrics] in your mind and eventually [it] will just pump on your head and you will just be thinking about it.

Thus, music plays a major role in the lives of the participants; like many adolescents, music is an inevitable component of their social environments and their social life (Bennett, 2001; Sloboda & O'Neill, 2001).

Some of the music that the interview participants said they listen to includes Western classical, Western jazz, rap, Indie classical, and R & B (this type of music combines classical rhythms with African types of music). A lot of teenagers, including many of this study's participants, have taken an interest in R & B because of its combination of different styles and its appellation. As with social media, the influence of music can be both positive and negative. This influence is largely dependent on the type of music the participants listen to, the amount of time devoted to listening to music, and the individual's personality. The positive and negative effects of music identified by the participants are discussed in two subsections below.

11.3.1 Positive influence of music

The areas of positive influence of music identified by the participants include its impact on the way they think, encouraging them to think positively as they enjoy the calmness that comes from inspirational and gospel music. As it is commonly stated, "music is the food for the soul." The result of listening to the right music is that it gives peace, calmness and joy to the listeners. It gives clarity of mind in facing the challenges of life. It also affects the actions that the teenagers perform. For example, the research participants said that when they listen to gospel or inspirational music, it ushers them into the place of the worship of God. They are then able to worship God freely through songs of praise and thanksgiving. They are able to study the Bible more and take part in Christian related activities more as they are able to connect with the realm of the spirit through songs. Additionally, music helps them to work hard on their tasks, be it schoolwork or domestic work from their parents. This is because listening to music takes away the pressure of the workload as they concentrate not on the enormity of the task before them but on the lyrics of the songs and the inspiration that comes out of it. One of the participants who expressed the view that music can positively influence someone's religion and spirituality posited that:

> I think it [music] does [influence religion and spirituality] positively. Like the lyrics I listen to; it's not about the lyrics, it's about the way it sounds. It kind of gives me peace of mind because, it's like, usually, I stress, but it's like, ease things out. (Jane, 13)

11.3.2 Negative influence of music

However, the participants who expressed the view that music can have a negative influence believed that music is not just about the beat and the soothing sounds but about the lyrics as well. They cautioned that, although it is possible for teenagers to think that they are just listening to the rhythm and beat of a song, they may become drawn to the words of the music. In particular, they mentioned that songs with swear words, typical in rap and pop music, could eventually erode one's religion and spirituality. One of the participants (Lucy, 13), alleged that

some musicians start out positively but then take a turn for the worse. She said: "Beyoncé, who started well, has gone into the bad way. I think that's affecting a lot of people, who will say, 'I want to be like her.'" She went on to say:

> If you look at a lot of rap videos nowadays, they are all about certain songs, although different lyrics. But they are singing the same songs; and teenagers will just get that mind-set into their heads and may be thinking 'it's okay,' even though they are filled with swearing words.

Mercy (13) similarly admitted that the songs that teenagers listen to "can, like, go into your head unconsciously, while you are listening to the music and you will just be thinking it in your mind and eventually [it] will just pump on your head and you will just be thinking of it." Joseph (14) concurred, saying "Because some or most of them [music that teenagers listen to] have bad languages, you will just keep listening to it and you will start to use those languages in your everyday life." In agreement, Mary (13) stated that:

> When you listen to music, the lyrics that they say, they were like Oh! F this, F that, and then you will be like, 'that is cool.' You can tend to forget about God when you listen to such music and just focus on that person and try to idolise them instead of focusing on God.

However, some participants, like Natalia (15) and Matthew (14), took a different view, saying that the influence of music on religion and spirituality depends on the strength of mind of the listener. This is how Matthew (14) put it:

> Erm, I think it depends on the strength of your own mind. So, like, if you really want to do something and you are always listening to songs in that line, then you are going to do it; but if you know strongly that you shouldn't do it, then you are not going to do it.

Similarly, Natalia admitted that she made a choice about which music she would listen to, based on the effect that such music could have on her. According to her, "Hum, I know myself… I know there are some songs that I shouldn't be listening to and that will not benefit me anyway. So, I don't listen to such songs."

As with social media, another way music influences the participants negatively is by consuming their time. Some of the interview participants reported that they waste a lot of time listening to music. Instead of using music as an inspiration to get work done, it can become a hindrance. This is because the amount of time and concentration put into listening to music outweighs the amount of time put into other tasks, such as school work, domestic work or even social relationships. The findings on the negative influence of music in terms of time wasting are consistent with studies conducted by Bennett (2001), Hargreaves, Hargreaves and North (2012), and Sloboda and O'Neill (2001), which claim that music can be a waste of time for teenagers, especially if the motivation behind playing or listening to music does not align with the interests of the teenager. Additionally, this study shows that music can cause social isolation for some teenagers, which may not be healthy for their social relationships, as they may find it difficult to make friends in the real world because of the excessive time spent listening to music.

Finally, all the participants agreed that society, whether through changes in mainstream values, social media or music, affects their religion and spirituality, although the extent of this influence will depend on the choices of the individual. Having discussed the influence of society from the perspectives of the interviewees in this section, the next section covers the influence of a particular fashion trend, tattooing and body piercing.

11.4 The influence of fashion: tattoos, body piercings and insertion of foreign objects

As a transitional stage, the teenage years are marked by different trends, such as fashion, technologies and beauty contests. Many teenagers have at one point or another followed these trends without considering the long-term consequences. This section presents the data collected on one of these trends, namely, the influence of the fashion trend of getting tattoos, body

piercings and the insertion of foreign objects into the body, on the religion and spirituality of the participants in this study.

Lucy (13) was the only one of the 27 participants to mention that fashion trends in society have an effect on the religion and spirituality of teenagers. Above, she was quoted as explaining how revealing fashion trends started by celebrities could be followed by teenagers who want to imitate that celebrity. Furthermore, she referred to not just the common fashion of clothing, shoes, and make-up, but also the trend of body piercing. As a way of giving voice to each of the participants, in line with an interpretive phenomenological study, I consider it important to discuss this topic. Although tattoos and piercings were not covered by my interview questions, and Lucy was the last person on my interview list and the only one to mention this topic, it is in any case related to the aim of my research, because Lucy connected this practice to religion.

After completing my interview with Lucy, I thanked her for coming and asked if she could think of any other topic pertinent to religion and spirituality that we had not touched on. She responded by saying:

> I thought you are going to touch on tattoos and piercing. Yeah, I just wanted to mention it because I think that it is something that is affecting a lot of people, even in schools, even our age, everywhere you go. Many African teenagers like me are getting their body [bodies] pierced and are also getting tattoos.

Lucy's comment came as a surprise to me. First, based on my observation during the interviews, all of the female participants had their ears pierced, which is a common practice amongst African girls, and they were all wearing earrings. In addition, their clothing did not look extravagant or noteworthy, according to my judgement. Second, none of the male participants had pierced ears, inserted any foreign objects into their bodies or dressed unusually. Therefore, I asked Lucy to explain what she meant. She told me that she was not speaking about normal ear piercing or the use of earrings when she mentioned piercings; rather,

she said, “Piercing on the tongue, on the belly and other parts of the body. I think a lot of people, because of what they see, they think tattoos and piercing are okay.”

Lucy explained that many teenagers, particularly black African teenagers, are getting tattoos and their bodies pierced because they believe this makes people more beautiful and because they want to imitate their favourite celebrities, who themselves have their bodies tattooed or pierced because it is in vogue now. Lucy also expressed the view that many teenagers are piercing their bodies nowadays “out of impulse, not really thinking about the consequences; not really thinking about what God wants for [them].”

Although studies on tattoos and body piercings are limited, particularly in relation to the religion and spirituality of teenagers, there are a few studies, which allude to this topic, and they are hence relevant to the discussion. According to Grief *et al*. (1999), the word tattoo comes from the Tahitian language, where it means to mark something. It is “a form of deliberate body alteration and it includes scarification and branding” (Tsang, 2014, p. 3).

Tsang (2014) maintained that tattooing can be traced as far back as the late fourth millennium BC in Europe, Asia, Africa and America (Caplan, 2000; Rubin, 1988). The practice has been refined throughout the course of its development and has served various functions and purposes. For example, in Europe, tattoos have been common among members of the working-class since the beginning of the 20th century (Sander, 1989). However, in some parts of Africa, such as Egypt, tattoos were traditionally classified as sacred and respected as a form of art, and consequently, only the prominent were fortunate enough to adorn themselves with tattoos (Scheinfeld, 2007). In addition, it is argued that tattoos served the purpose of differentiating powers and duties, amongst group members, in societies and cultures, which lacked written

language, (Porcella, 2009). Arguably, tattoos have also been used as a status symbol to distinguish between slaves and free members of a society and as a visual form of communicating the importance of an individual within a tribe in some cultures (Gay & Whittington, 2002). Tattoos have permeated different cultures and societies, sometimes serving as a form of body embellishment or a platform for human expression with different meanings, which might depend on the application (Berry *et al*., 1992). Although in Western societies, before the last century, tattoos carried a stigma of being punitive rather than decorative and honourable, in comparison to Eastern societies where they have been very popular because of the complexity of their aesthetics (Caplan, 2000). However, this notion has changed in the last century in the Western world, where tattoos and body piercing have become popular fashion among different age groups.

Studies revealed that many people, including teenagers, get tattoos nowadays for various reasons, ranging from individuality and identity (Wohlrab *et al*., 2007), aesthetical appeal (Millner & Eichold, 2001), peer pressure (Claes *et al*., 2005), and therapy. The purpose of which sometimes, is to overcome the feeling of alienation of one's body, especially among people who have endured a traumatic situation, such as sexual abuse (Stirn *et al.*, 2011). In addition, Kluger and Aldasouqi (2013) claim that another motivation for adornment with tattoos may be medical. Arguably, tattoos can be used as a way of camouflaging scars. However, Huxley and Grogan (2005) affirm that tattooing and body piercing carry health risks. Furthermore, Kluger and Aldasouqi (2013) found that many who adorn themselves with tattoos and body piercings do so because of their desire to look good and feel good. Carmen, Guitar, and Dillon (2012) argued that tattoos and body piercings can be a sign of resilience and inherent strength. Kuwahara (2005) also stated that tattoos have the potential to strengthen friendship bonds. In religion, tattoos are sometimes considered to be spiritual (Gay & Whittington, 2002).

Gay and Whittington (2002), citing Mercury (2000), maintained that tattoos could help people to connect with oneself and spiritual world because they enabled those who have them for spiritual purpose to hear voices of their souls or psyche. In Buddhism and Hinduism, tattoos are regarded as an important feature of ritual and tradition (Scheinfeld, 2007). However, in Islam, Christianity and Judaism, the use of tattoos and their purposes are perceived as generally unwelcome (Wroblewski, 2004).

Nonetheless, one particularly pertinent finding is that in the contemporary Western world, the practice of tattooing and body piercing has become very popular across all ages and social classes and religions, including Christianity (Gilbert, 2001; Wohlrab *et al*., 2007). They have become a fashionable way of expressing individuality among young people rather than belonging to a community, as they are used to capture and express the essence of self (Bjerrisgaard, Kjeldgaard, & Bengtsson., 2013). In the study of Gay and Whittington (2002), it is observed that some young people are motivated to get tattoos nowadays because of desire to be in control. Arguably, they think since their bodies belong to them, they could decorate them as they wish and do not have to justify their choices to anyone. Nevertheless, Madfis and Arford (2013) argued that the use of tattoos and body piercing may become problematic when tattoos cannot serve a purpose beyond symbolic representation. However, no further light is shed on the type of problem that might arise if tattoos and body piercings are limited to symbolic representation. In addition, there is no enough empirical evidence of negative health implications caused by these practices.

Arguably, the popularity and acceptance of tattoos and body piercings across many societies today, particularly among teenagers and young people, is as a result of their visibility among celebrities and entertainers, and of their popularity being promoted by social media (Koch *et*

al., 2010), as well as the lack of research on their short and long-term implications, either physical or spiritual. Consequentially, contemporary youth are exposed to a culture that is welcoming to tattoos and body piercings, and this has an influence on their perception of these practices (Kosut, 2006).

Even though there are limited studies on the implications of tattoos and body piercings, Lucy, the participant quoted above, stated that she thought that piercing the face, belly (navel), tongue, or having a tattoo that is exposed, is not right, not only for religious reasons, but also because it is unacceptable in certain professions. This is how she put it:

> How many doctors have you seen that have their tongues pierced? How many doctors have you seen that have piercings all over their faces? I don't think anyone will want to employ such a doctor to practice in the hospital.

Even though Lucy was quick to condemn tattoos and body piercing, she admitted that she admires them, and that she was even contemplating of getting a part of her body pierced or a tattoo. According to her, "I'm not going to lie, I do like piercing and tattoos, and not just normal ear piercing, but I'm getting another piercing [ear piercing, even though she already has one] in a few weeks actually. I don't think God is against it, I don't know." Lucy argued that the reason for her interest in tattoos and piercings is that they add to a person's beauty. Lucy's statement above is in agreement with Huxley and Grogan (2005), who found that many people are getting tattoos and body piercings for aesthetic reasons. Although Lucy stated that she has no problem with her body image, she thinks it is reasonable to try to improve it as a teenager. When Lucy was questioned about her motivation for having another ear piercing, despite her first reaction to tattoos and piercings, she said that sometimes the intensity of one's love for fashion and the popularity of such fashion, in this case, tattoos and piercings, can overshadow the knowledge that one has of its long-term implications.

Arguably, it is possible that Christian teenagers, who are attracted to the culture of tattooing and body piercing are following these practices ignorantly as an impulsive action or because they think God is silent about the issue, just as Lucy explained. However, Huehnergard and Leibowitz (2013) noted that the Bible explicitly states that God is opposed to body piercings and tattoos; He warned the people of Israel against adorning themselves in such ways. In the book of Leviticus 19:28, God commanded the Israelites that, "Ye shall not make any cuttings in your flesh for the dead, nor print any marks upon you: I [am] the LORD" (KJV). Arguably, adorning oneself with tattoos and body piercings can represent an idol, which Christians, like the Israelites, are commanded not to worship. Poland and Holmes (2009) argued that tattoos are used to convey a transgressed identity, as it constitutes an act of rebellion (Pitts, 2003). It is also argued that tattooing is part of a subcultural style that may have political motivations and could be perceived as a negative symbol. While it may be too early to categorically state that tattoos and body piercings are good or bad, Lucy's statement showed that she is confused about the place of tattoos and body piercings in the Bible and in the church doctrine, even though she was aware that having visible tattoos or body piercings might be a disadvantage in certain professions.

Although Lucy found it difficult to articulate the RCCG's position on this issue, she cautioned teenagers like herself against getting piercings and tattoos because she thinks that Christians,' particularly teenagers,' bodies, as well as their spirits, belong to God and should therefore be treated as sacred. This is how she put it:

> Erm, your body is a Temple [of the Holy Spirit], and the Bible says that God dwells in your body. [Though], He [God] doesn't make it clear what He feels about tattoos and piercing, but at the same time, I do feel that you need to be care[ful]. You can't just say, 'it's my body, I will do what I want' because it's not your body. I assume that Christ dwells in you and it is His body. You know, He [God] owns it [your body] as well.

Lucy's conflicting attitudes towards tattoos and body piercings, as documented here, could be attributed to a lack of proper understanding of the issue. Firstly, tattoos and body piercings are rarely discussed in Pentecostal churches like the RCCG. Hence, there could be no means of her knowing the stance of God or the church on the issue. Secondly, many youths and young adults, in the RCCG and other popular Pentecostal churches, whom Lucy might have come in contact with, are likely to have had more than one ear pierced and even tattoos done without any objection from the church leadership, and as a result, Lucy could have concluded that it is acceptable within the church setting. Furthermore, Lucy might have seen some TV celebrities with tattoos of the cross, or quotes from scriptures, or the image of Jesus, and they might have claimed that they got those tattoos as a way of propagating the gospel. All of these phenomena are widespread and could have contributed to Lucy's confusion regarding the status of tattoos and body piercings in Christendom and from the perspective of God.

However, it is interesting that Lucy stated that she would check with God first before she carries out another piercing in her ear. This supports the evidence that many teenagers in the RCCG believe that they can speak to God about anything because God hears them on a personal basis and responds to them directly about any topic. Although I did not have the opportunity to verify whether Lucy went ahead with her additional ear piercing or not, this discussion demonstrates the necessity for more scholarly inquiry into the status of tattoos and body piercings among Christian teenagers, particularly those from black background.

11.5 Chapter summary

This chapter has revealed that besides the influence of religion and spirituality on the lives of the research participants, the contemporary society in which they live also has an effect on their religion and spirituality. Although some research has been carried out on the influence of the

society on the religion and the spirituality of teenagers, this topic has not been adequately investigated by scholars. This study shows that societal principles, social media and music all have a great influence on the religion and spirituality of contemporary teenagers, especially the participants of this study. This influence is both positive and negative, and depends on different factors, such as the individual's background, personality, and the amount of exposure to the particular type of societal influence.

This study found that it is now becoming more difficult for teenagers to hold on to religious and spiritual principles than it used to be because of the way the society is changing in its principles and value system. These changes are not favourable to the religious principles held by many Christians, including the participants in this study. Living in such a society, where religion and spirituality have been widely abandoned, makes it difficult for many teenagers, including many of the participants, to practise religion and spirituality without compromising their Christian values. For example, this study reveals that some of the interviewees have found themselves in situations where it would have been easy for them to compromise their faith by changing their mind-sets about certain issues which they would have abhorred as Christians, in order to fit in to the society where they live. In addition, this study also found that the parents of the interview participants exacerbated the effect that societal principles have on these teenagers due to their lack of understanding of the pressures the teenagers face. As a result, the study revealed that some teenagers have to live a life of pretence by behaving in a certain way at home and church but differently when outside in the society or among their peers, outside the influence of their parents and church.

This chapter also presented and discussed in detail an unexpected finding from the data, which was the influence of a culture that promotes tattooing and body piercing. This topic was raised

by one of the participants, Lucy, at the end of her interview and was deemed significant enough to include and analyse here. The practice is condemned by the church, but it was found that this was not clear to Lucy. The section on this topic also provided an overview of the scant literature that exist in this area, revealing that much more investigation is needed, particularly, in relation to religion and spirituality.

Finally, as a result of limited research on the influence of society on the religion and spirituality of teenagers, it is recommended that further studies are carried out on this interesting topic from different contexts and age brackets. Having discussed the influence of the society on the religion and spirituality of the participants, the next chapter discusses the influence of social contexts.

Chapter Twelve: The Influence of Social Contexts on the Religion and Spirituality

12.0 Introduction

This chapter presents the data on the influence of social contexts on the religion and spirituality of the participants, black churchgoing teenagers between the ages of 13 and 15. This is particularly important because of the roles that social contexts play in the religion and spirituality of teenagers. Previous studies (e.g. Adogame, 2010; Collins-Mayo & Beaudoin, 2010; Gunnoe & Moore, 2002; Regnerus, Smith, & Smith, 2004; Sartaj & Aslam, 2010) have confirmed that the environment where a child grows up has a significant effect on the way he or she relates to religion and spirituality. Regnerus, Smith and Smith (2004) assert that most teenagers' religion and spirituality depend on the type of upbringing and friends they have. They claim that teenagers who are brought up in a religious home and also have religious friends will likely maintain a strong religious and spiritual standing, whilst teenagers whose parents and friends are not religious, will themselves find it difficult to relate with religion and spirituality.

This study is in agreement with the above extant literature, confirming that social contexts have a great influence on the religion and the spirituality of teenagers. However, the current research differs from previous studies, firstly, because they were carried out in different contexts than the present study, which investigates how social contexts influence the religion and spirituality of black churchgoing teenagers. None of the earlier studies have addressed this influence on this particular group, the way this study does. Secondly, the findings in this study are peculiar to a limited age group, and future findings in similar contexts might be different based on certain factors such as background, personality, and age, as mentioned in the analysis chapter. This chapter contributes to the existing literature that addresses the influence of social contexts on the religion and the spirituality of teenagers from the perspective of black teenagers who

are living in England. Whilst there may be numerous social contexts which affect teenagers' religion and spirituality, the findings reported in this study are limited to the home (parents and extended family), the school (including peers), and the church (role models, support, as well as activities and teaching techniques).

12.1 The influence of the home

This study has revealed that the home environment of the participants has a significant impact on their religion and spirituality. This includes the relationship they have with their parents, siblings and their extended families, particularly their grandparents. Generally, parental and family influence is very strong among black African families. This includes the influence of grandparents and extended family members, as they all share the responsibility of teaching children about cultural values, practices, language, as well as the religion of the family. The study confirms that African parents often instil in their children, their beliefs, both religious and cultural, as they attempt to bring them up in line with their long-standing traditions (Forman, 2001; Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 2001; Sartaj & Aslam, 2010). It is revealed that the relationship between child and parents is very significant in the way the teenager relates with religion and spirituality. This is because the parents' style of upbringing serves as an important component in shaping children's views about themselves and their world. Parents are also seen as a source of healthy self-esteem, self-worth, healthy thinking and behaviour in children (Santrock, 2005). Researchers have found a positive relationship between solid parenting techniques and child outcomes, including academic success, cognitive development, emotion regulation, and adjustment (Davidov & Grusec, 2006; Sartaj and Aslam (2010).

In general, the teenagers who took part in the interviews appeared to have relationships characterised by love, trust and acceptance with their parents and other family members,

including their siblings and the extended family, although a few claimed that their parents are overbearing. They have also reported that their parents, both fathers and mothers, are Christians, although a few of them reported that their fathers do not attend church as regularly as their mothers, due to their work schedules and availability. Arguably, the religion and the spirituality of many teenagers depend on the environment in which they grow up (Gunnoe & Moore, 2002; Regnerus, Smith, & Smith, 2004). A few of the extracts from the participants are presented below.

Amos, a 15-year-old participant, like many other research participants, shared his experience, demonstrating how the home can affect the religion and the spirituality of teenagers. Amos lives with his father and his mother. He has one younger sister, who also lives in the same home. While recounting the influence of home on his religion and spirituality, Amos said that everyone in his family has an effect on his religion and spirituality, but he described the influence of his parents thus:

> They would encourage you to come to church more, and they will say 'read your Bible', this and that. And I may not have read my Bible as much or even be a Christian if not for them.

Lucy (13) reported a similar experience as Amos, saying:

> I'm not sure I will be a Christian if I haven't been brought up in Christianity. I don't know, I'm not really sure I would, but yeah, they [parents] have a massive influence. From since I can talk, it's just been church, church, church. Even now we go to church three, four times a week. Yeah, she's [mother] not able to be in church today because she's at work. You know, God is a massive part of her life and she's so religious; she's so spiritual that sometimes, you look and think, calm down! But, you know.

The comments made by Amos and Lucy are consistent with extant studies (Santrock, 2005; Sartaj & Aslam, 2010) which demonstrate the importance of parenting styles and family relationships on religion and spirituality. The parenting style adopted by Amos' and Lucy's parents could be identified as authoritative. Sartaj and Aslam (2010) have shown that

authoritative parents are assertive without being intrusive or restrictive, they are flexible and encourage independence and individuality in their children. They also welcome the participation of their children, including teenagers, in family decisions. The above studies also reveal that teenagers whose parents demonstrate an authoritative style of parenting will have good family relationships and be closely attached to their parents and siblings. Such a family will be able to share views and opinions and also have a high level of communication. As a result, the teenagers themselves will have a high level of self-esteem, self-confidence, self-reliance, self-control, and inquisitiveness, which will eventually manifest in the way they relate with religion and spirituality. Although this study did not look intently at the influence of parenting style on the religion and spirituality of the participants, the comments of Amos and Lucy show that the encouragement they receive from their parents led them to adopt Christianity as their religion and become spiritual.

Extant studies (Crawford & Rossiter, 1991; Park & Bonner, 2008; Sherkat & Ellison, 1999) have revealed that the relationship that exists between the family and teenagers will affect the way they relate with religion and spirituality. It is noted that teenagers whose parents and friends are very religious are likely to exhibit very strong religion and spirituality, whilst those whose family and friends are less religious may end up not being strong religiously. This relationship factor is important, and consistent with other extant research on the subject matter. For example, Crawford and Rossiter (1991) maintained that teenagers respect and value the viewpoints of others, and they will particularly listen to adults whom they respect when that person discusses issues related to values, religion and spirituality. Sherkat and Ellison (1999) also revealed that religiously active parents may be more likely to influence their children's behaviour positively than less religiously active parents. This is because parental religiosity has a very high likelihood of influencing the development of religion and spirituality in

children. Arguably, religious parents are able to teach religious behaviours and beliefs to their children, thus passing their religious beliefs and practices on to their children from an early stage of life. They are also able to manage actively their children's lives in order to expose them to a social network with shared religious beliefs and values, including denomination affiliation (Benson, Donahue, & Erickson, 1989; Francis & Gibson, 1993; Miller *et al*., 1997; Okagaki & Bevis, 1999). For instance, Okagaki and Bevis (1999) reported that there were consistent relationships between the religious beliefs of their female participants and their parents, particularly the mothers. According to Okagaki and Bevis's research, consistent relationships between the religious beliefs of teenagers and parents happens in a situation where parents are in agreement about religious beliefs and are able to constantly talk about them to their children. This present research is also consistent with Benson, Donahue, and Erickson (1989), who indicated that religious activity in the home, combined with clear messages regarding religious beliefs and practices, combined with parental love and support, could lead to high levels of religiousness on the part of teenagers.

Even though it is possible to argue that one of the contributing factors in the influence of parents on the religion and spirituality of the participants is the fact that they are still dependent on them, particularly, most of the time, to give them a ride to and from the church. The study shows that the participants whose parents, particularly their mothers, show a high level of religiosity through their beliefs and practices, are keen to follow their footsteps, as reflected in the way they relate with religious beliefs and practices. This includes both private and public religious practices of the parents, such as praying and attending church, respectively (Litchfield & Thomas, 1997). It is also revealed that the participants in this study were able to internalise the religion of their parents because they perceived that their parents accepted them as they are without being judgemental (Bao *et al*., 1999). Studies also show that the church attendance of

both the father and the mother (Brody *et al*., 1994; Wilcox, 2002; Yeung, Duncan, & Hill, 2000) is important to the church attendance and participation of teenagers. This is why Wallace and Williams (1997) suggested that "greater attention needs to be given to the ways in which the primary socialisation [parents] of children and adolescents within the family context is shaped by religion" (p. 461).

Another participant who acknowledged the influence of family is Jane (13). Jane attributed her perception of and relationship with religion and spirituality to her grandmother. She said:

> Me and my grandma, my mum's mum, are very close. She always encourages me and teaches me Bible stories. I always share whatever I am going through with her. Like, I have this thing, like a vision about life after death; it's about tribulation. The last one I had, I think that was probably in March or sometime, since then, my grandma gets to phone me a lot more, and she has been really helpful in connecting me with God. Like, she would tell me that you can ask God if you want to do something and not feel like God is not answering or anything.

Jane's comment is an indication of the type of relationship that exists within a family, particularly many Nigerian families. Even though some members may be abroad, they are still tied to their extended families back in Nigeria. And these extended family members can influence the lives of those abroad, including their religion and spirituality, as conveyed by Jane in this study. This is because Nigerian families do not practise the nuclear type of family where the children are subject only to the immediate parents; rather, the way a child is brought up is the duty of the whole extended family, not just the father and the mother. Many times, the influence of extended family members can be negative. But in the case of Jane, it was a positive experience. Even though Jane's grandmother was in Nigeria at the time of the interview, Jane reported that she affects her life as a Christian, particularly in helping her to get closer to God.

Generally, this study reinforces previous research in that it reveals that the degree to which religion is an integral part of family life influences the way teenagers relate with religion and spirituality. It also shows that the religion of the parents is important in shaping both the teenager's behaviour and the behaviour of their parents towards them, which is an important aspect of their wellbeing (Ellison & Sherkat, 1993). As with the extant literature, the findings in this study reveal that parental influence is demonstrated directly through the quality of the family relationships that exist between parents and teenagers. It shows that the family unit, in this case, both the nuclear and the extended family unit, is considered an important structure within the black African Christian community, particularly among the RCCG members. Pearce and Axinn (1998) reported that the mother-child relationship is one of the most important influences on the way teenagers relate with religion and spirituality. In their study, Pearce and Axinn revealed that children and teenagers will relate more to the religion of their mothers, especially if the relationship between them is loving.

Despite the positive influence of family on the religion and spirituality of these interview participants, the study also revealed that not all religious households can boast of positive relationships between every member of the household, particularly the teenagers. This is due to issues relating to the parenting style adopted by the family. This is exemplified by Natalia's (15) description of her parents as too strict. She stated that they do not allow her to socialise or interact with other people outside her family, claiming that doing so will make her (Natalia) forget her roots (Nigerian) and the family religion. But from Natalia's perspective, it only shows a lack of understanding on their part. This is how she put it:

> My parents are too protective. Like sometimes, I want to go out with my friends, like my friends, their parents let them go out, like once in a while. They go to party and everything, although they don't drink. They just go out. [But when] I tell my mum, she will be like, 'Why do you want to go there? For what reason? What does it benefit you? And how does it benefit you? And I'm like, I just want to go. They [her parents] just don't understand it's to socialise, but they just think you are going to socialise with bad

> people, people who will bring you out of Christianity. And then that is true because some people can bring you out of Christianity, like some friends, if you are not, like careful, to look at them and say are you really trying to bring me out of my religion and my collection with God. Yeah that is the thing.

Natalia's comments above are in agreement with the extant literature with respect to the relationship between parenting style and developmental outcomes among teenagers, in particular, African and Asian children. For instance, Forman (2001), Suárez-Orozco and Suárez-Orozco (2001), and Sartaj and Aslam (2010) have all found that African and Asian parents in trying to instil their beliefs, both religious and cultural, in their children could be displaying authoritarian styles of parenting by becoming too domineering, and this can have a negative effect on their teenagers. Sartaj and Aslam (2010) argue that while adolescents raised by authoritative parents will likely have better homes, health and emotional adjustment, adolescents raised by authoritarian parents are likely to have greater levels of hostility and aggression, emotional instability, attachment problems, lower self-esteem, negative self-perceptions, and negative attitudes towards life, including towards religion and spirituality.

Although Natalia did not show any sign of hostility towards her parents or religion, she mentioned that when she leaves home for the university, she will probably not return back home until she graduates, and by then, she would be an adult who could decide what she wants to do, including whether to go to church or not and the type of church to attend, if she still wants to go to church. Due to the link between parenting style and the religion and spirituality of the participants of this study, it is recommended that further studies be carried out on the influence of parenting styles on the religion and spirituality of teenagers, particularly among African families. The next section discusses the influence of schools and peers on the religion and spirituality of the participants of this study.

12.2 The influence of the school

The findings presented in this section concerns the influence of the school, including the teachers and the curriculum. The participants in this study maintained that the type of school they attend influences the way they relate to religion and spirituality. This includes the teachers, especially those who teach religious education, and the curriculum set for studying religion. Whilst the natural assumption would be that the government-maintained schools (schools that are founded by churches and academies), particularly those that are affiliated with a religion, will all have a positive influence on the religion and spirituality of the teenagers, and vice versa with the community schools (conventional schools that are solely under the control of the government); the findings in this study actually indicate that the influence of the government maintained schools can be both positive and negative. Furthermore, this influence varies in degrees and nature. While some participants reported a positive influence, especially those who attend government maintained schools, with a few exceptions, others, especially those who attend community schools, claimed that the school had a negative or no influence on their religion and spirituality. The teenagers who claimed that the school positively supports their religion and spirituality cited corporate prayers offered in the school, Mass (Christian services) performed in the school, the religious education teachers and the Chaplain (who provides both spiritual and moral support), as examples of how their school positively influences their religion and spirituality. Below are excerpts from the interviews, which reveal some of the influences of the school as reported by the participants, starting with positive influence.

12.2.1 Positive influence of the school

Lucy (13), Shimon (14), Mary (13), and Grace (15) all attend a government maintained school. They, like other participants who attend the same type of school, claimed that the school they attend plays a key positive role in the way they relate with religion and spirituality. These

teenagers, when asked whether the schools they attend affect their religion and spirituality, gave the following responses.

Lucy:

> Well… the school has a [positive] influence on me in the sense that, erm, we have services and we have Mass constantly for the year, and in our classes, we pray before lessons start; so the school supports it [religion and spirituality] that way.

Similarly, Shimon declared:

> They [the school] do influence my religion and spirituality through the assembly, which we do every morning, and RE [Religious Education] lessons. We are also encouraged to see the Chaplain if there are any issues bothering us.

Furthermore, Mary (13) stated, "We pray every morning before we leave class and we study RE [Religious Education], compulsory. So, we have learned about God and learnt about stewardship and something like that."

Additionally, Grace (15) said, "My experience of school so far has been good. I am doing well academically. I get on well with a lot of people in school. I have a friendship group and I have a lot of friends in the school, who are Christians. They [the school and the friends] all influenced me positively." Grace and others demonstrated that they could speak freely about their Christian faith to their teachers as well as other students. An example of this is Florence (13), who claimed that, "I spoke to some teachers about it [Christian beliefs]. I spoke to my friends. All of my friends know that I am a Christian and I have a few Friends that aren't Christians, but they respect my religion and I am not afraid to speak about it to them." The next section presents the findings on the negative influence of school.

12.2.2 Negative influence of the school

While it would be expected that the participants who attend government maintained schools, particularly, those with a Christian affiliation, would report that their school has a positive influence on their religion and spirituality, one participant offered a view that contradicted this assumption. Jane (13) recounted her experience of confusion when she started to attend her current secondary school, which is a government maintained school. Jane said that she had attended a community school for her primary education, but her mother insisted on her attending a government maintained school, specifically a Catholic school, because of the Christian ethos and teachings, which her mother believed she would receive from the school. However, according to Jane, this was far from being the case. She related an initial experience at this school wherein her RE teacher interpreted some aspects of the Biblical teachings and beliefs in a way outside mainstream Christianity. She stated that she became confused because of the way the Bible was being presented, and was surprised to learn that her RE teacher claimed not to belong to any religion.

Jane said:

> I think with teachers, it's just about money, especially the RE teachers, because like when I joined the school, I got really confused because they were saying things like… the Bible is, like [the] interpretation does not really mean it's true. Like the RE teacher was saying the [splitting of the] Red Sea did not really happen but something like reed; and you are thinking 'should they really be saying that?' And they are trying to make everything technical, like oh! Jesus is born in a Cave, and you just think, do you really want to know where Jesus is born? Is not about where but about the story behind it.

Jane expressed her disdain because of the high expectations that she had before she started there, as she hoped the school would help her in her Christian walk with God. She thus confounded her RE teacher's comments and apparent misunderstanding, even though she (the teacher) might be trying to explain a different perspective or interpretation. Jane's experience could be seen as one way in which teachers' interpretation of the Bible could be misunderstood among teenagers. Although only a few of the participants attend community schools, all of

them maintained that the school either did not do anything to influence their religion and spirituality or had a negative influence. The most significant area of influence linked to the school by these participants is the influence of their school friends and peers. Hence, this is discussed in the next section under the category of the influence of peers.

12.3 The influence of peers

The findings in this study show that peer influence is very important in the lives of the participants. While most of the participants of this study stated that their friends have a negative influence on their religion and spirituality, a few reported that their peers had no influence on them in that regard. One of the participants, Rejoice (13) claimed that the influence of peers is more obvious on teenagers like herself who were not born in the United Kingdom (UK), but came as immigrants with their parents from African countries, whether as infants or teenagers. According to Rejoice, many African teenagers want to be accepted by their peers. Unfortunately, it is difficult for many African teenagers to find this acceptance, particularly among peers from different ethnic groups, without compromising their religion and spiritual ethos, which they might have built while in Africa or in their families. This is because as teenagers, the acceptance of their peers is very important. The findings show that the teenagers might give up some church related activity in order to attend social events, or they might behave in certain ways, which they know are not acceptable as Christian teenagers. They would not behave that way without the influence of their peers.

However, the findings also show that the extent of the influence of peers depends on the participant's personality and his or her relationship to God, religion and spirituality. For example, while many of the participants agreed that their peers influenced them either

positively or negatively, a few, such as Rejoice, Mercy, and Grace, maintained that the influence of their peers in this regard is minimal. According to Rejoice (13):

> Hum, I think British teenagers have a big influence on new people from different countries. I have seen many teenagers who decided not to go to church anymore because of their friends. Erm, I will also say it depends on the teenagers themselves. If you are easily influenced, that is the problem, like me, I'm not easily influenced. If I don't want to do something, I won't do it.

Similarly, Mercy (13) specified that the influence of friends also depends on how strong a teenager is in his/her faith and how deep the relationship is between that person and God. For example, she said, "If somebody is not strong in their relationship with God, then it is easy for friends to influence their religion and spirituality and their belief in God. But if you are a strong person in faith, it will not be easy to be influenced by friends." In the same vein, Grace (15) said, "I used to go to the chapel to pray on Wednesday during the lunch break last term, and would not be able to hang out with them [her friends] but they really didn't mind because they know I am a Christian." Meanwhile, Angel (13) stated that her peers did not influence her religion and spirituality. According to her, "No one is bothered that I'm a Christian."

However, the participants who claimed that their friends and peers have an influence on their religion and spirituality stated that the influence of friends could both be positive and negative. While the participants who claimed that their friends and peers influenced their religion and spirituality positively are few, and the influence they report is very minimal, it is nevertheless worth mentioning here. Florence (13), for example, when asked about the influence of her friends and peers on her religion and spirituality, stated that, "Erm, they [peers and friends] have influence, but not that much. There are some of my Christian friends that we speak together about Christianity and stuff, but not that much. We mainly talked about it [religion] when we are in the exam time, or when we have hard situation, we pray together."

However, the majority of the interview participants maintained that their friends and peers have a negative influence on their religion and spirituality. While some of the participants like Rejoice and Mercy, claimed that friends' colossal influence depends on individual teenagers and his or her personality and individual circumstances, most of them, including Mary, Georgina, and Joseph, took a different view. These teenagers asserted that the influence of friends could be so strong that it could be difficult for them to resist, regardless of their circumstances or personality. Mary, in describing the negative influence that peers could have, said:

> When we grow up with friends, any type of friends, we get peer pressured to do what we don't want to do, and we get distracted by what they do. So if they smoke, we'll be like, oh that seems cool, let me do that, [even though] our parents may be like, don't do that. We will say, I'm going to do it, because my friends tell me to do it.

Similarly, Georgina stated that:

> The friends you choose can impact you a lot. Like, at the start of my school, in year 7 to 9, I had bad friends, and I started bad behaviour and could talk back to everyone, even everyone at home. But like it depends on the friends you pick because they influence you a lot. So, if you have bad friends, actually in the home, it will be really bad.

Although Wallace and Williams (1997) argued that religious parents may attempt to shape the other domains of socialisation, including peer pressure, of their teenage children. The interview participants in this study claimed that the influence of peers is usually stronger than that of their parents; that if given a choice, they will choose to listen to their peers' advice rather than that of their parents.

Another participant, Joseph (14), stated that he had to hide his religion from his peers to avoid ridicule. He said:

> I don't think they [school friends/ peers] know about it [his religion]; even if they know about it, they will probably just make fun of me… One of my friends said that he is a Christian and then the people in the school were making fun of him… So I just decided not to tell anyone. (Joseph, 14)

Joseph's statement above seems to reveal why some teenagers keep their religion and spirituality a secret. Although he stated that he did not personally experience intimidation as a result of his religion, his friend's experience made him perceive religion and spirituality as a private affair. Joseph, who attends a community school, blamed the type of the school he attends for the negative influence of peers. He declared that, "my friends have a lot of influence on me, not in a good way though, in a bad way; since the school is not a Catholic or Christian [school], they weren't influencing me in a good way." He further commented, "Erm, I have a group of about nine friends. When they are by themselves, they are always good, but when they are together they always want to do bad things." Joseph maintained that doing 'bad things' with his friends was considered to be 'cool'. Hence, on many occasions, he stated that he would join his friends in this 'cool' act to the displeasure of his parents. Joseph maintained that his friends and he are "just being influenced by each other," thinking that if they don't do such things, they are not going to be considered cool. He then lamented how following his friends had caused him to be excluded from his former school and grieved the hearts of his parents. This is the way he articulated his experience:

> Hum, in school, I do get in trouble very often [because of my friends]. [On one occasion], I misbehaved and they had to get my daddy and have a meeting with him. And my dad, he wasn't happy for about a week, like he wasn't talking to me. And I had isolation in school and a week exclusion… my dad told me that if I stay not in school, or get into trouble again, I have to move school. Then I changed my behaviour in school and I tried. After that, when my friends are going to do something bad, I just stay by myself. But I still moved school, not because of my behaviour now.

Mary, Joseph and Georgina all admitted that the friends they keep have a negative influence on them, but having recognised this influence, they decided to find new friends. As a result, they changed their behaviour, and this positively affected their grades and their relationship with their families. Georgina, in describing her own experience with changing her behaviour, said: "When I decided to stay at home and study for my test instead of going out with my friends, I got good results from my test and I got rewarded by my parents." The above

statements show that the influence of friends on teenagers could be in any aspect of their lives, including their academic achievements as well as their faith.

Lucy claimed that the negative influence of peers had even led some teenagers to leave the church altogether. This is how she put it:

> And I think that's why a lot of people, when they get to [a] certain age, they start to leave Christianity because of their friends. You know, if you are alone with God, I think you will be a lot better to be honest, because your friends, you know; you want to do something and your friends will say, oh, no, why do you want to do that? Or why do you want to go to this place? Why do you want to go to that place? Not even just in religion. For example, if you want to go to [an] after-school club every Friday, because you are interested in learning musical instruments, for example; your friends may say, 'Oh! No, that's for gigs' or 'why does she want to do that?' That's why a lot of teenagers don't decide to go to church anymore, because of their friends.

Lucy's statement above indicates that some teenagers abandon going to church because of the influence of their peers. Consequently, the influence of peers on the religion and spirituality of the participants is massive and primarily negative, not just in terms of their religion and spirituality, but also on their attitude to learning and church attendance.

The findings in this study are consistent with Traore and Lukens (2006), who carried out a study among African immigrant youth in the USA. Traore and Lukens argue that their African teenage participants reported having to contend with basic and disapproving images, harassment and insults from their peers, who are from other ethnic groups and are in the majority. In an attempt to make themselves acceptable, they reported that they are expected to adopt particular beliefs and behaviours (Butterfield, 2004; Carter, 2003), which in most cases conflict with their parents' expectations and their own personal religious beliefs. However, it is reported that some Nigerian immigrant teenagers in America, just like the participants of this study, were able to negotiate their identities among racial, ethnic, and cultural expectations and

misrepresentations (Traore & Lukens, 2006). Having discussed the influence of school on the religion and spirituality of the teenagers, the next section is about the influence of the church.

12.4 The influence of church attendance

As mentioned under the section on the participants' perceptions of church attendance, all of the teenagers agreed that attending church has a positive influence on their religion and spirituality. The programmes that these teenagers mentioned as contributing positively are: adult and peer mentoring and support, corporate prayer sessions, Bible study, and personal evangelism.

The participants stated that they enjoy counselling and coaching from their peers and adults within the Parish. Moses (15) argued that having a network of peers in church for support has contributed positively to his religion and spirituality because he can learn from the experiences of those who have previously gone through similar issues that he might be facing. He said:

> Because there are a lot of teenagers and friends who know they've been through the same thing you are [going through], and they can relate to that more. They are the same age as you, etcetera.

Joy (13) similarly reported that she benefited from such support. She said:

> They [adults and peers] give me encouragement to be more confident, like push me to do better things, like read the Bible and pray; and they are able to teach you things that other people might not be able to. They [her Sunday school teachers] also offer me an opportunity to serve as teaching assistant once a month, in the younger class, which I think will help me in future if I want to go to a teaching job.

In agreement with Joy's statement, Angie (13) asserted:

> Erm, in my old church, there was a lady, she really was very passionate with Christianity. When she was preaching, she [would] start to speak in tongues. She [would] start crying when she starts preaching. And she is like, I don't know. She is like … she made me think. 'Yeah, it's like, when I grow up, I want to spread the Word of God, I want to be like her, even if it's starting from my brother. I will call my brother and say, "come, let me teach you" or let me, I don't know, let me see how much you know about the word of God.

However, Grace (15) presents an exception regarding the influence of the adults and teachers at church, even though she conceded that, "[having] like different classes where we learn stuffs pertaining to being a Christian and being a teenager contributed to my religion and spirituality." According to her, the age difference between the teachers and the students constituted a barrier to her connecting with the material most of the time. She also commented that the personal experiences of the teachers, as well as the contexts in which they grew up (mostly in Nigeria), were completely different from hers, and consequently served no positive purpose in the way she relates to religion and spirituality. This made Grace assume that these teachers could not understand what she and the other participants experience. She also lamented the dearth of teenagers in her age bracket that she can relate to in the parish she attends. She said:

> But I will say in our church, we don't have that many teenagers and the teachers are not our age. Therefore, they cannot understand the issues we are going through because we are in a different generation, they probably would not have known about or they wouldn't have experienced it because they grew up in a different time and most of them did not grow up in England. So they have had a different experience in life.

Grace was not alone in thinking that the generational and cultural differences between the teachers and the teenagers in the church have not benefitted them. For instance, Precious (14) argued:

> I don't really think the older people in my church [including the teachers] contributed to my religion and spirituality. Erm, because most of them are like parents. I wouldn't say old, but they're way older than me. So, I wouldn't really be able to connect with them.

From the perspectives of Grace and Precious, being able to connect is essential to the positive influence they expect from their church, but to them, the church has not been able to provide this through its teaching. Hence, they reported that some of their needs have not been adequately taken care of by the church.

The participants nevertheless maintained that they have benefitted substantially from their church's corporate prayer sessions, especially when they are tasked with leading the whole

church in prayer and exhortation. When the question about the influence of the church was posed to Joy (13), she stated that:

> [The] church has influenced me because we have Bible studies, where we pick a particular book or topic and look at the lessons from it. We also have prayer meetings, where we all just get together to pray. Sometimes, we were told to lead the whole church in Bible study and prayer. I think this had helped me.

Although Joy did not clarify *how* leading the Bible study and prayer has helped her, I assume such activities would have trained her on how to prepare, because it is expected that anyone who leads a Bible study or a prayer meeting would have prepared properly to carry out the task. Additionally, Joy would have learned about time management, as the two programmes that she mentioned have a specific amount of time allocated to each of them, which she would not want to exceed.

The participants also mentioned that they enjoyed representing the church in outside activities, such as personal evangelism at street fairs, where they are able to speak one-on-one with people in the community about their faith, or they collaborate with other church denominations and parishes to serve the community. They argued that while representing their parishes in different corporate programmes helps build their confidence in public speaking, it also trains them to be able to defend their faith as they meet with peers, whether from school, other parishes, different church denominations, or those that are not of the same faith as them.

Furthermore, the participants of this study maintained that having separate church services for teenagers in their different parishes gives them the opportunity to express themselves within a circle of their peers, as they are able to discuss issues that are more pertinent to their age group, rather than being asked to be part of the larger church group. Another area of influence mentioned by the participants is the planning of a specific curriculum that meets the needs of teenagers. The participants stated that the church has a separate programme for children and

youth, which is tailored to their learning needs. They also claimed that the teachers were using teaching styles and techniques that allow them to relate theory to practice. They reported that the practical illustrations provided by the teachers gave them the opportunity to relate the teachings to real life situations. In addition, they asserted that they benefited from church programmes and activities, such as the annual Bible club, where children from other churches are invited to take part in a whole day of creative Bible lessons and Christian-related activities, such as organising a movie, quizzes, debates, and so on. They also mentioned Youth Week, which is a programme that takes place once a year in all the RCCG Parishes at different times. For this programme, the youth are given the keys to the church for a week. They are the ones who control every activity of the church, including all the weekday programs and Sunday services, which include preaching. The youth are allowed to bring whatever creativity they want to the programme during this week, as long as they are in line with the teachings of the Bible and the doctrine of the RCCG. Many who participated in this programme maintained that it enhances their relationship with God.

Furthermore, the participants also stated that they benefited from the youth-organised song festival and entrepreneurship, where they are given a free hand to organise programmes, such as the praise festival or charity work, on behalf of the church. They are tasked with raising funds for this programme through entrepreneurship, such as selling tickets, cakes or other things that could generate money. According to them, these programmes have helped them with organisation and leadership. However, the programmes mentioned above include ages not covered by this study, because in the RCCG, youth church is for ages 11 to 16, while the age bracket for this study was 13 to 15. Nevertheless, most of the time, the majority of the youth in all of these Parishes falls between ages 13 to 15. Hence, the bulk of the responsibility falls on this age group.

As mentioned previously, the support that the participants reported receiving from the church does not involve, in most cases, material or financial support. I am not claiming that none of these participants has benefited materially or monetarily from the church, as a few of them might have received such a gesture from the church. However, none of them attested to this. What they do mention is the spiritual and moral support they receive, through mentoring, counselling and coaching, which they obtain from other members of the church, including their peers and teachers.

Additionally, another area of influence that the participants spoke about is the Festival of Life. This is a biannual event organised by the RCCG executives, where all the members of the RCCG, along with some Christians from other denominations, come together to pray overnight about personal issues relating to their lives as well as pray for the UK and the world at large. The Festival of Life is an extension of the Holy Ghost Festival, which is conducted every month in Nigeria. According to Natalia (13):

> Erm, I like Festival of Life because is like the whole Redeemed has to come together. Like lot of churches [Parishes] just come down to worship God and have a good time, and just thank Him for everything and share the testimony. We know you go there believing that He [God] answers all of our prayers. And it's just a good thing in my life [because] it brings unity.

She also stated about her local Parish, "I love praise and worship. It's just a good way to connect to God," and also claimed that, "I like the interactive session we have most of the time and the Word [Bible exposition]. I like it because it is a time for us to give our own opinion. Like the way we think about that topic and we would not get judged; like, everyone just has an opinion."

As recorded in the literature review of this thesis, the extant literature has shown that church attendance plays many roles in the way teenagers relate with religion and spirituality. For example, Francis (2011, 2013) discussed extensively the influence of church attendance on the

religion and spirituality of teenagers in the United Kingdom. Consistent with this study, the findings in Francis (2001, 2013; Park, 2001) revealed that church attendance has a considerable positive influence on the religion and spirituality of teenagers. Amongst these are the claim that church attendance helps teenagers to make the right decisions, such as not getting involved in anti-social behaviours, like smoking cigarettes or using drugs, or truancy; rather it helps teenagers to work hard in school. This study also agrees with Francis (2001) that even though teenagers attend church on a regular basis, it does not affect their views on alcohol consumption. The participants of this study differ in their opinion about the consumption of alcohol. While some think that drinking alcohol is totally wrong, a few of them maintained that it could be okay to drink alcohol as long as it does not get to the stage of drunkenness. This study is also in agreement with Park and Bonner (2008), who found that church attendance, particularly if parents are also members, has a positive influence on the academic performance of teenagers. The participants in this research revealed that adults in the church provide support for them, not necessarily monetary, but academic, moral and social support. This support motivates them to perform better in school and to maintain a positive attitude towards education. The next section summarises the chapter.

12.5 Chapter summary

This study has demonstrated that the influence of social contexts is very important to the religion and spirituality of the interview participants. It has been argued that the home environment is an important aspect of the participants' lives because it provides support and motivation, which have a positive influence on these teenage participants. The study also found that the school environment, including the curriculum, the teachers, and the peers, plays an important role in the religion and spirituality of the participants. The chapter reveals that

although the roles of these agencies are both positive and negative, the majority of these influences are negative.

This chapter also described the church as a social context, which exerts a very positive influence on the participants. The specific factors range from the youth's church teachers, adult role models, peers and friends, as well as the support provided by the church for these teenagers. It is, however, reported that there are a few participants who felt they were not adequately supported by the parishes they attend, claiming instead that church leaders have been critical of them. The next and final chapter concludes the thesis.

Chapter Thirteen: Conclusions and Recommendations

13.0 Chapter introduction

This chapter presents the summary and conclusions of this thesis, starting with the importance of the study. It also presents the summary of the new empirical findings in the thesis and their contributions to the research world. Additionally, the chapter records the limitations of the study and presents the recommendations for future research. This study is important for several reasons, first, it is the only study, as far as I know, to investigate religion and spirituality in relation to black teenagers in the UK, at a time when research has shown that most teenagers are no longer interested in institutional religion and spirituality, in particular Christianity. A number of studies (Kim & Esquivel, 2011; Mason, Singleton, & Webber, 2007) have argued on whether teenagers in general are still interested in religion and spirituality, yet this study has revealed that the participants are still much interested in and actively pursuing religion and spirituality in a personal way and within the larger church institution, even though their methods of worship might be different from those of adults. This importance is demonstrated in the number of times the participants attend church programmes per week, and the personal relationship that they claimed to have with God, resulting in their engagement in both local and public church activities, as well as having allocating personal time for Bible study and prayers, both within and outside the church. It has been revealed that, on average, the participants attend church programmes at least once a week.

Second, the qualitative methodology afforded me the opportunity to collect data orally from the research participants, which allowed me to match what was said to how it was said, which may not be possible if any other method is used for collecting data. The interpretive phenomenological approach adopted in this research focused on allowing the participants' individual voices to be heard. The study adopted the interview method and interpretative

analysis as its primary ways of investigating the phenomenon. The participants were 27 black teenagers of African, majorly from Nigerian origin, who are regular attendants at the Redeemed Christian Church of God (RCCG), one of the Black Majority Churches (BMCs) in England. The choice of participants was based on purposive sampling, and the choice of the context was based on the rapid growth experienced by the denomination in recent times, which is linked to the attendance of teenagers.

This thesis established that each of the participants interpreted religion and spirituality differently, based on their personal understanding. Specifically, personally meaningful manners of expression within this thesis allowed the research participants to express their views on religion and spirituality in relation to other factors that affect the way they relate to the phenomena. It has been argued in this study that even though some people might interpret spirituality outside religion, the two concepts are interrelated and could be interpreted in relation to one another. This has been confirmed through a cross-disciplinary review of the key constructs of religion and spirituality. This chapter details the contributions this study makes to knowledge by summarising its main findings, discusses its limitations, and offers recommendations for future research.

13.1 Research summary and contributions

This thesis attempted to answer the following three research questions: What is the perception of the participants about religion, spirituality, and church attendance? What is the influence of the contemporary British society on the way black churchgoing teenagers engage with religion and spirituality? And, what influence does the participants' social contexts (home, school, church) have on their religion and spirituality? The interview questions were derived from these three guiding questions.

Chapter 7, the first empirical chapter, described the findings on the participants' perceptions of religion and spirituality, which first entailed asking them to define the terms. Their definitions, most of which overlapped, were then compared to the definitions offered by previous researchers, with which there was a considerable degree of agreement. The chapter also explored the participants' views regarding the relationship between these two terms, finding that the majority saw spirituality as the practice of religion and as one's personal relationship with God. Thus, they saw the terms as interrelated, although several of the participants noted that someone could be religious without necessarily being spiritual, explaining that such a person would attend church but not necessarily have accepted Jesus as their Lord and saviour, or his/her personal relationship with God would be weak.

Chapter 8 presented the findings on the participants' views on attending church, and the effect of regular church attendance on their religion and spirituality. This study identified three main reasons why the participants attend church, namely, because they wanted to learn about God and have fellowship with other believers, because of the support that the Church offer for their faith, and because of their parents.

Chapter 9 discussed the various religious and spiritual beliefs held by the participants, which were found mainly to align with the teachings of the RCCG, with a few notable exceptions. For example, one of the participants expressed doubt about life after death and the existence of Heaven and Hell, as well as about the creation.

Chapter 10 presented the data concerning the participants' religious and spiritual experiences. Specifically, it provided information about the participants' conversion experiences, their personal practices of prayer and Bible study, as well as their communal involvement.

Conversion, in Pentecostal churches, is seen as a specific, defining moment that occurs when an individual accepts Jesus as personal Lord and saviour, and all of the participants confirmed that they had had such an experience. This marked the beginning of their personal relationship with God. Furthermore, they provided accounts of their personal prayer practices and Bible study, with most of them confirming that they pray at least once a day. Some of them reported reading the Bible directly, while others preferred to read devotionals, particularly the one known as *Open Heaven*, which is published by the RCCG. Most of them read both at various times. They also provided information about their communal involvement at the church.

Chapter 11 described the participants' accounts of the influence of society on their religion and spirituality. Specifically, it presented the findings on the influence of societal principles and values, particularly focusing on attitudes towards homosexuality, pre-marital sex, and the consumption of drugs and alcohol. The participants all said they took a negative view of these activities but that this often was challenging for them, since all of these activities are viewed positively by the wider, mainstream society. Hence, the societal principles usually had a negative impact on their religion and spirituality. This chapter also described the effects of social media and music, which were more mixed, as the participants stated that both could have a positive effect if used in religious ways, but that the effect was more often negative. This is because social media are usually used to promote behaviours that the church views negatively and because music often contains swear words and similarly promotes irreligious activities and views. Additionally, the study evaluated the influence of fashion, in particular, tattoos and body piercings, on religion and spirituality of the participants. Even though this topic was not part of the original research questions, I deemed it necessary to discuss in line with the IPA methodology employed for this study.

Chapter 12 presented the findings on the influence of social contexts on the religion and spirituality of the black churchgoing teenage participants. First, the influence of the home was discussed, and it was reported that many of the participants felt that their parents did not understand their lives and wanted them to behave like African teenagers rather than British ones, resulting in tension. Some even reported living a kind of double life where they were one person at home and at church and another person with their friends and at school. In any case, they all reported that their parents had a positive effect on their religion and spirituality by being one of their primary motivations for attending church, with a few of the participants expressing doubt about whether they would continue to attend regularly after leaving their parents' guardianship.

Another social context discussed in chapter 12 was the school. The participants attended either government maintained or community schools. While it was found that the influence of the latter on the participants' religion and spirituality was uniformly negative, the influence of the former was found to be positive in all but one instance. Furthermore, the chapter discussed the influence of peers, which was found to be negative except where the peers were also Christians. Finally, it presented the findings on the participants' views concerning the influence of attending church on their religion and spirituality, which was generally found to be positive, except where the participants felt that church leaders and teachers did not understand them and the circumstances they face outside church and home.

The principal contribution of this study is that it builds on previous research on the religion and spirituality of teenagers and extends that research to include the religion and spirituality of the black churchgoing teenagers. This study offers evidence that religion and spirituality influence the participants positively in different areas of life, such as, in their decision making, behaviour,

health and wellbeing, relationship with family members, attitudes to learning and educational attainment. Religion and spirituality also shield teenagers against negative behaviours and juvenile delinquency.

However, this study reveals that even though religion and spirituality influence the lives of teenagers positively, the extent of their influence depends on certain factors surrounding the individual teenager. Evidently, the extent of one's commitment to religion and spirituality depends on factors such as family background, type of school, peer influence, and personality differences among the teenagers. In addition, the findings also demonstrate that the society in which the teenagers live exerts a great influence on their religion and spirituality. As revealed in this study, societal factors that have influence on the religion and spirituality of teenagers include societal values, social media, music and fashion. Arguably, much of the influence of these factors is generally negative when it comes to religion and spirituality.

Another contribution of this study is that it serves as a platform on which other studies on the religion and spirituality of black churchgoing teenagers can be built. It is expected that it will give church leaders, in particular in black majority churches, an avenue for understanding the prospects and the struggles of black churchgoing teenagers in relation to their religion and spirituality in this country. Hopefully, this will facilitate the provision of the necessary help and support for these youngsters.

Furthermore, it is my hope that educators, particularly, teachers, will find this study useful in helping them to understand the perceptions of black churchgoing teenagers in their schools concerning religion and spirituality, thereby helping them with proper interpretation of the Bible and in providing an avenue whereby religion and spirituality can be nurtured. Finally, it

is my belief that this study will serve as an eye-opener to parents, children church teachers, and youth teachers in terms of helping them in their given role of nurturing and caring for the young people. Invariably, it will enable them glean insight into the perspectives of the youth, instead of relying on their authority over the teenagers who are in their care.

13.2 Research limitations

Although it has been argued that all research methodologies have their strengths and weaknesses, and that no methodology can claim to be the perfect research tool (Langdridge, 2007; Willson, 2010), it is believed that these limitations offer opportunities for future research. As a qualitative research study using an IPA approach, one of the limitations that I encountered was a lack of precision in terms of rules or strict protocols (Giorgi, 2010). However, I discovered that rather than seeing this as a weakness, it served as an opportunity for flexibility. Arguably, the IPA method is not lax, but as Smith (2010) puts it, it is "a dynamic and iterative process where prior analytic comments are revisited in the light of the unfolding account" (Smith, 2010, p. 191). This process requires very rigorous steps of analysis, as described in the methodology chapter.

Furthermore, while I trust that my selection of the interpretative phenomenological approach was rigorously made as an appropriate choice for this research, based on my epistemological selection, a possible limitation of this approach is its reliance on the participants' accounts of their religion and spirituality. The participants' abilities to be reflective and thoughtful in their accounts vary, and this may have an influence on the data. Although most of the discussion focused on their current settings and on-going religious and spiritual experiences; the participants explored and discussed past experiences that shaped their religion and spirituality.

This recounting of past experiences was based on their ability to reminisce events and experiences, which might not be one hundred percent accurate.

Additionally, the IPA approach that I used in this study requires the researcher to have highly developed skills in communication, as it is concerned with making the voice of an individual participant heard in the research. Decisively, the skills of listening, knowing the right time to speak, and building of rapport were utmost. As an IPA study, the ability of the participants to discuss and make meaning of their experiences is of great significance. For example, data were gathered in this study through interviews, which is a technique that gives precedence to the way the participants choose to describe their experience rather than observation of the experience itself. It is noted that some participants were more eloquent and detailed in their discussion than others. Also, as a new researcher in this field, I am still developing my own skills, and more experienced scholars may be able to produce greater data that are richer than I might. While I carried out the present research using semi-structured interviews, future researchers might consider an ethnographic study to add further richness to the data on the religion and spirituality of teenagers.

Another limitation of this study relates to the settings. The participants in this study are all black African teenagers, mainly from Nigeria, with a few from Kenya and Ghana, between the ages of 13 and 15. Hence, it is expected that future research could seek to expand on the knowledge generated in this study by investigating the religion and spirituality of teenagers from, for instance, different African ethnic groups or different age brackets. In addition, all of the 27 participants in this study's sample are of the same denomination, the Redeemed Christian Church of God. Arguably, the doctrines and the beliefs of this denomination could affect the way the participants relate with this study. Furthermore, the research was carried out

in one location, Leicester. While this reduced the number of factors that could influence the study, such as cost, availability and familiarisation, it is suggested that more research on the religion and spirituality of teenagers in a different location or in more than one locations be considered in the future.

A further limitation of this study concerns the positionality of a researcher in an interpretative phenomenological approach. While an interpretive phenomenological study encourages the researcher to write him- or herself into the study, there is the likelihood that my worldview has influenced my interpretation of the data. As a middle-aged, black African woman, mother of three teenagers, a Christian, with theological and education backgrounds, who attends a church of the same denomination as the participants in this study, my research is viewed and shaped in a certain way. It is likely that researchers of a different culture, age, gender, and/or faith would shape and interpret such a study in different way.

Furthermore, although I do not consider this a limitation, the study may have yielded some different data if I focused exclusively on male or female participants. However, it was not my aim to include gender as a focus of the thesis, but to focus on the religion and spirituality of teenagers, of both genders. Finally, consistent with all qualitative studies, this study does not claim that the findings are generalisable; nevertheless, the data gathered might be useful in providing insight to future researchers (Duncan, Hart, Scoular, & Bigrigg, 2001).

13.3 Recommendations for future research

I conclude this study with several suggestions for future research because there are a number of issues arising from this study that point to areas suitable for further investigation. Most relevant to the results for the principal research question, regarding the influence of society on

the religion and spirituality of teenagers, is the need for more academic studies taking both qualitative and quantitative approaches. This would provide a balanced argument on some of the questions as to why many teenagers in the UK are leaving the church or no longer interested in the Christian religion. This study found that the influence of the society is usually stronger than that of the home or the church.

Second, it is recommended that more research be conducted among teenagers from ethnic minority groups in the United Kingdom because of the limited number of studies with this focus. It is also important because research has shown that the majority of teenagers who are still devoted to religion are from these groups. This will give room for comparison regarding what is needed to be done in other Churches where teenagers have stopped attending.

It is also recommended that more qualitative research be carried out to address the "how" and "why" questions concerning religion and spirituality among teenagers because the empirical research using this approach is limited. Additionally, another recommended area of inquiry is the influence of fashion, especially tattoos and body piercings. Furthermore, while the present study was carried out using purposive sampling, due to my background knowledge as a researcher on the subject matter, it is recommended that future studies investigating the religion and spirituality of teenagers seek to recruit participants through different sampling methods. Finally, while there is no limit to the possibilities for future inquiry, it is hoped that this thesis will prove insightful for anyone interested in the religion and spirituality of teenagers.

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Appendixes

Appendix A: Ethical approval form

Application for Ethical Approval for Research Degrees

(MA by research, MPHIL/PhD, EdD)

THE UNIVERSITY OF WARWICK

CENTRE FOR EDUCATION STUDIES

Student number: 1465457

Student name: Racheal Adebayo

PhD ✓ EdD ☐ A by research ☐

Project title: Religion and spirituality of black churched teenagers in the UK

Supervisor: Professor Leslie Francis and Dr Elisabeth Arweck

Funding body (if relevant):

Please ensure you have read the Guidance for the Ethical Conduct of Research available in the handbook.

Methodology

Please outline the methodology, e.g. observation, individual interviews, focus groups, group testing etc.

The methodology that I propose to use for this study is qualitative. Data will be collected through face to face interviews with young people and adults. Where this is not possible (for example, if a participant is not available or due to unforeseen circumstances), Skype or phone interview will be used.

Participants

Please specify all participants in the research including ages of children and young people where appropriate. Also specify if any participants are vulnerable e.g. children; as a result of learning disability.

The participants of this study are in two categories.

The primary participants of this proposed study are teenagers, ages 13-15 year olds. But, because these teenagers are under the age of consent, I have considered including the parents/carers as secondary participants. This is because they have parental responsibility for these participants. Another set of participants are the pastors of these teenagers. This reason for including them as participants is because they have spiritual responsibility for these teenagers and I intend to use their church premises for the interview. Consent of all the participants will be obtained before the commencement of the interview.

The participants that are vulnerable in this interview are the primary participants. This vulnerability includes: the way they will perceive an adult interviewing them, this could create a barrier between the participants and the interviewer. The social status, especially in a church where I work as a children's worker, the teenagers might be afraid of opening up, for the fear of confidentiality being broken or of being judged. I will assure the participants before the commencement of the interview that none of their answers will be discussed with their parents or any other teachers; that they will not be judged in any way by whatever information they share.

Vulnerability of the participants could also show in other churches where I am not known. The participants might be afraid of discussing some issues with a total stranger. See note under protection of the participants on how I shall deal with this.

Respect for participants' rights and dignity

How will the fundamental rights and dignity of participants be respected, e.g. confidentiality, respect of cultural and religious values?

I plan to respect the rights of the participants by telling them that their participation is voluntary; that their information will be kept secure in a locked cabinet or in password protected file if on the computer. I will also inform them that their information will be

confidential and not disclosed to any other person, except my supervisors, or used for any purpose other than for this research and any publication associated with it. I will let them know that the only exception to this confidentiality is if there is an issue of safeguarding, in which case I will be obliged to discuss such issues with the appropriate people that will be able to help them. I will inform them that they are allowed to opt out of the interview at any stage without any consequence, if they feel they do not want to do/continue with the interview. I will also let them know the duration for which their data will be kept.

I will respect the dignity of the participants through the consent forms which will explain the purpose of the study to the participants. Two copies of these forms will be given to the participants, their parents/carers and their pastors prior to the commencement of the interview. They will be allowed to keep one for themselves, while the other will be signed and returned to me after any clarification has been made. I will show the participants the interview questions if they demand it but will make the answers confidential. I will provide an environment that is conducive to conducting an interview of this kind, away from noise and eavesdroppers, and be vigilant of any sign of discomfort during the interview. I will stop the interview if any discomfort is noticed and give them the choice of when to continue with the interview. I will give the participants, their parents and their pastors consent forms to read and agree or disagree with before they commit to the study.

Privacy and confidentiality

How will confidentiality be assured? Please address all aspects of research including protection of data records, thesis, reports/papers that might arise from the study.

The confidentiality for this study will be assured through the use of pseudonyms for the participants. None of the participants' identity will be revealed through the information provided. The identity of the parish they attend will also be protected with a pseudonym, in order confidentiality in this respect. I will assure the participants that their data will only be used for the proposed study and any publications that relate to the study. I will inform them before the commencement of the interview that the discussion will be kept

confidential, but that it will be discussed with my supervisors for the sake of data analysis. If there is any safeguarding issue, then I would have to let safeguarding officers know in order to help them. I will also inform them that I will not discuss the information with their parents or friends, unless they give me permission. Any recording gadgets will also be password secured. Any written notes, including transcriptions will be locked up safely. The venue that will be used will be a place where there could be no eavesdropping.

Consent

How will prior informed consent be obtained from the following?

From participants: I will get the consent of the participants before the interview through oral request and written consent form. The forms will be given to each of the participant to read and sign after verbally explaining the reason for the consent form to them. I will also give them the chance to ask questions, if they have any, before they give their consent to participate in the interview.

From adults: I will get the consent of the parents of these teenagers because they have parental responsibility for them. I will explain verbally to them the purpose of the interview and then give them consent forms, which they will sign after they agree to its content. I will also give consent forms, which will be different, but similar in some way to the ones given to the parents, to the pastors, because they also have pastoral responsibility for these teenagers.

If prior informed consent is not to be obtained, give reason:

n/a

Will participants be explicitly informed of the student's status?

Yes.

Competence

How will you ensure that all methods used are undertaken with the necessary competence?

I am confident in the use of qualitative methods because I have used this method in my previous studies

Studies in which I used individual face - to - face, in-depth interviews include:

1. The impact of religion on the professional identity of English language teachers in the adult education learning; presented in partial fulfilment for the award of MA in applied linguistics and TESOL (2013).
2. The causes of indiscipline among youth: A case study of some selected secondary schools; presented in partial fulfilment for the award of post graduate diploma in education (2004).
3. The role of a Christian mother in the spiritual development of a child; presented in partial fulfilment for the award of MA Christian education (1996).

In addition, I have been reading books and articles in order to update myself. I am also attending training at the University of Warwick (ARM) on the use of qualitative method for research purpose. One of my supervisors, Dr Arweck, is also an expert in qualitative methodologies, and I believe I will benefit from her rich experience, as she advises me on the use of qualitative methods.

Protection of participants

How will participants' safety and well-being be safeguarded?

Environment: The plan is to use a church venue for the interviews. This is because it is the most convenient place for the participants. I intend to seek permission of the use of the premises from the pastor prior to the time of the interview.

If the participants show any sign of discomfort, I will stop the interview. I will give the participants the option of inviting a friend or an adult, who will sit as a listener during the interview. I will ensure the safety of the property before the commencement of the interview and check that their fire safety is up-to-date. I will also check that all the gadgets for the recording are in working condition prior to the interview and keep checking as the interview progresses.

Child protection

Will a CRB check be needed? **Yes** ☐ (If yes, please attach a copy.)

Attached with this document is my current active (online registered) DBS (CRB). I have applied for another DBS through my department.

Addressing dilemmas

Even well planned research can produce ethical dilemmas. How will you address any ethical dilemmas that may arise in your research?

As a professional teacher, who has taught students ages 11 to 16 for many years, I will trust my experience and training to guide me on how to address any dilemma that may arise during the interview process.

Misuse of research

How will you seek to ensure that the research and the evidence resulting from it are not misused?

I do not envisage any misuse of these data because my supervisors and I will be in charge of the data and will protect the data.

Support for research participants

What action is proposed if sensitive issues are raised or a participant becomes upset?

I will be attentive to the mood of the participants if sensitive issues are raised. If the participant becomes upset, I will give them the option of resuming the interview at another time. If the reason has to do with safeguarding, I will discuss with my supervisors and follow the laid down procedures of safeguarding in my department.

Integrity

How will you ensure that your research and its reporting are honest, fair and respectful to others?

I will make sure I use data collected for this research without distorting any of them. The real words of the participants will be transcribed and used for analysis. I will use all interview answers in this research proportionately, without neglecting any of the answers given by the participants. I will also report all the findings faithfully. In the case of lack of clarity in the answer, this will be shown through the appropriate symbols in my transcription.

What agreement has been made for the attribution of authorship by yourself and your supervisor(s) of any reports or publications?
In practice, this means that supervisor and student will agree the authorship of individual papers on the basis of the intellectual contributions made by the respective authors.

Other issues

Please specify other issues not discussed above, if any, and how you will address them.

Included are the consent forms for the participants, their parents/carers and the pastors.

Signed: [redacted]

Student: Racheal Adebayo Date: 25/04/2015

Supervisor: [redacted] Date: 28.5.15

Please submit this form to the Research Office (Andy Brierley, room WE133)

Office use only

Action taken:

- [x] Approved
- [ ] Approved with modification or conditions – see below
- [ ] Action deferred. Please supply additional information or clarification – see below

[redacted] 28/5/15

THE UNIVERSITY OF WARWICK
CENTRE FOR EDUCATION STUDIES

Appendix B1: Informed consent form for the parents/carers

Project title: The religion and spirituality of black churched teenagers in Leicester

I am researching the religion and spirituality of black churched teenagers in Leicester for a PhD study at the University of Warwick under the tutelage of Professor Leslie Francis and Dr Elisabeth Arweck. I will speak to many black teenagers about their experiences as Christians in this part of the world. In this information sheet, I will be asking your son/daughter some questions about his/her Christian experiences, as a black teenager.

- I will ensure that the identity of your child is protected by adopting an anonymous name for your child and his/her church in the research.
- Data that your child will provide will be secured and not shared with anyone outside this project.
- Your child will be allowed to opt out of the study if he/she feels no longer interested even after given of his /her consent because his/her participation is entirely voluntary.
- If you have any question about the research, I or one of my supervisors will be glad to answer it.
- It is necessary to fill out this form because the University of Warwick requires it as part of its ethical procedures.

I agree that my child can take part in the above study Yes ☐ No ☐

I agree to the interview being audio recorded Yes ☐ No ☐

I agree to the use of anonymised quotes in publications. Yes ☐ No ☐

I can confirm that I am over 18 years of age and the parents/carer of ----------

I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet for the above study and have had the opportunity to ask questions. ☐

I understand that my child's participation is voluntary and that he/she is free to withdraw at any time, without giving reason. ☐

Name of the parent/carer: Signature Date

Church:

Name of the researcher Signature Date

The University of Warwick
Coventry CV4 7AL
United Kingdom
Tel: +447958181952
E-mail: r.o.adebayo@warwick.ac.uk

THE UNIVERSITY OF WARWICK

CENTRE FOR EDUCATION STUDIES

Appendix B2: Informed consent form for the participants

Project title: The religion and spirituality of black churched teenagers in Leicester

I am researching the religion and spirituality of black churched teenagers in Leicester for a PhD study at the University of Warwick under the tutelage of Professor Leslie Francis and Dr Elisabeth Arweck. I will speak to many black teenagers about their experiences as Christians in this part of the world. In this information sheet, I will be asking you some questions about your Christian experiences so far, as a black teenager.

- I will ensure that your identity is protected by adopting an anonymous name for you and your church in the research.
- Data that you will provide will be secured and not shared with anyone outside this project.
- You will be allowed to opt out of the study if you feel you are no longer interested even after you have given your consent because your participation is entirely voluntary.
- If you have any question about the research, I or one of my supervisors will be glad to answer it.
- It is necessary to fill out this form because the University of Warwick requires it as part of its ethical procedures.

I agree to take part in the above study.	Yes ☐	No ☐
I agree to the interview being audio recorded	Yes ☐	No ☐
I agree to the use of anonymised quotes in publications.	Yes ☐	No ☐

I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet for the above study and have had the opportunity to ask questions. ☐

I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving reason. ☐

Name of the participant: Signature Age:

Church: Date:

Name of Researcher Signature Date

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THE UNIVERSITY OF WARWICK

CENTRE FOR EDUCATION STUDIES

Appendix B3: Informed consent form for pastors

Project title: The religion and spirituality of black churched teenagers in Leicester

I am researching the religion and spirituality of black churched teenagers in Leicester for a PhD study at the University of Warwick under the tutelage of Professor Leslie Francis and Dr Elisabeth Arweck. I will speak to many black teenagers about their experiences as Christians in this part of the world. In this information sheet, I will be asking some of your black teenage members, questions about their Christian experiences.

- I will ensure that the identities of the participants of this study are protected by adopting anonymous names for them and their churches in the research.
- Data that your members will provide will be secured and not shared with anyone outside this project.
- Any of your members, who wish to opt out of the study, will be allowed to do so without given any reason because their participation is entirely voluntary.
- If you have any question about the research, I or one of my supervisors will be glad to answer it.
- It is necessary to fill out this form because the University of Warwick requires it as part of ethical procedures.

I agree that my member could take part in the above study Yes ☐ No ☐

I agree to the interview being audio recorded Yes ☐ No ☐

I agree to the use of anonymised quotes in publications. Yes ☐ No ☐

I can confirm that I am over 18 years of age and I am the pastor of ----------

I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet for the above study and have had the opportunity to ask questions. ☐

I understand that my members' participations are voluntary and that they are free to withdraw at any time, without giving reason. ☐

Name of the Pastor Signature

Name of the Church: Date:

Name of the researcher Signature Date

The University of Warwick

Coventry CV4 7AL

United Kingdom

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Appendix C1: Key word extraction in alphabetical order

Description
Alcohol
Beliefs (God, life, death, life after death, hell, heaven)
Bible study
Bullying
Children church
Choices adultery alcohol disobedient drugs dating smoking sex before marriage
Christian homes
Church Redeemed Christian Church of God attendance programmes role models children church teen classes
Communication
Community
Devotion(al)
Divorce
Embarrassed about religion
Evangelism
Family extended immediate
Faith
Fashion clothing make-up piercing
Games football jogging
God
Heaven
Health and wellbeing healthy lifestyle
Holy Spirit
Home
Identity

cultural (African, White) religious Christianity)
Influences British society extended family parents peer religion school
Jesus Christ
Language at spoken at home English Spanish Yoruba
Marriage
Migration
Music gospel music hip hop pop music rap music
Perceptions church attendance divorce
Prayer
Relationships God parents siblings
Religion and spirituality
Respect parents teachers
School faith mainstream
Social media Instagram Facebook Snapchat Twitter WhatsApp
Spirituality
Technology PS4 TV Xbox 360

Appendix C2: Themes and sub-themes category

	Name of theme and sub-themes derived from data	**Illustrative quotes**
1	**Perception of religion and spirituality**	
	Religion	Religion as "what someone believes in."
	i. A belief	
	ii. A classification	Religion is "just a terminology, a classification."
	iii. An institution	Religion is "when people gather together to believe in their God and to pray to God to help them in their lives."
	iv. A set of dos and don'ts	Religion is like "a set of do's and don'ts, like something you have to stick with…."
	Spirituality	
	i. A personal experience	Spirituality is "when someone is really holy and really believes in Christ."
	ii. A mystical experience	Spirituality is "like something beyond the physical ... something beyond the physical."
	iii. An outward experience of religion	Spirituality is "the depth that you go into in your religion."
	Influences of religion and spirituality	
	i. Choices	"Oh! Religion and spirituality have definitely influenced me to [know] what I should and shouldn't do."
	ii. Behaviour	Religion and spirituality "help me not [to] take some decisions that other people took."
2	**Perception of church attendance**	
	i. To worship God and fellowship with others	Church (attendance) "is important because you need a fellowship so that you will be encouraged in the Word."
	ii. Because of support	"Mature people in the church "help me in my spiritual growth."
	iii. Because of parents	"Erm, it is my parents [that make me attend church] because if they weren't going, I don't think I will be going."
3	Beliefs	
	i. God	I believe that "God is the creator of everything and we are put here to worship him."
	ii. Death	"Death is like when you get older, maybe you get sick or you just die or because God just wants you to go."

	iii. Life after death/heaven and hell	"I think there is a life after death. I think that also has to do with how you follow God's words on earth." "I believe that after we die, we decompose".
4	**Religious and spiritual experience** i. Conversion experience ii. Personal experience of (prayer, bible reading)	"Someone who says 'I am a Christian' means that they accepted Jesus [into their lives]." "I pray every day. I pray when I wake up, and throughout the day." "I read the Bible. I have this devotional. Sometimes I read my devotional. It teaches you everything you need to know about being a modern Christian, a modern Pentecostal Christian, and how to overcome things."
5	**Societal influences** i. Societal values ii. Social media and technologies iii. Music iv. The fashions and tattoos	 "Erm, I think society can influence us [black teenagers] in both good and bad [ways]." "Hum, I guess it [social media] can be good and bad. Good that you could have a Bible App and have Bible verses each day, which you can look through." "When you are listening to music, the things that they say in the song, they can, like, go into your head unconsciously." "Many African teenagers like me are getting their body [bodies] pierced and are also getting tattoos."
6	**Social contexts influences** i. Home ii. School	"I'm not sure I will be a Christian if I haven't been brought up in Christianity. I don't know, I'm not really sure I would." "Me and my grandma, my mum's mum, are very close. She always encourages me and teaches me Bible stories." "They [the school] do influence my religion and spirituality through the assembly, which we do every morning." "I think with teachers, it's just about money, especially the RE teachers."

	iii. Peers	"Hum, I think British teenagers have a big influence on new people from different countries." "When we grow up with friends, any type of friends, we get peer pressured to do what we don't want to do, and we get distracted by what they do."
	iv. Church	"They [adults and peers] give me encouragement to be more confident, like push me to do better things, like read the Bible and pray." "I don't really think the older people in my church [including the teachers] contributed to my religion and spirituality."

Appendix D: Demography of the participants

S/N	Name	Sex	Age	Parish	School	Social media
1	Amos	M	15	Green pasture	Mainstream school	Facebook, WhatsApp, and Email
2	Angie	F	13	King of Glory	Mainstream school	TV and Phone
3	Anthony	M	13	Amazing Grace	Faith school	Facebook, TV, Instagram, WhatsApp, and Game console
4	Faith	F	13	City of Favour	Mainstream school	Snapchat, WhatsApp, email, Instagram, and Xbox 360
5	Felicia	F	13	Amazing Grace	Mainstream school	Instagram, TV, and Phone
6	Florence	F	13	City of Favour	Faith school	TV and Phone
7	Georgina	F	15	Amazing Grace	Faith school	Instagram, Snapchat, YouTube, and TV
8	Goodness	M	13	Covenant of Grace	Faith school	Instagram, Phone, and Xbox 360
9	Grace	F	15	Amazing Grace	Faith school	Instagram, Twitter, Facebook, and Snapchat
10	Jane	F	13	Amazing Grace	Faith school	Instagram, Snapchat, and YouTube
11	Joe	M	15	Amazing Grace	Faith school	Phone, Instagram, Facebook, email, and Game console
12	Joseph	M	14	City of favour	Mainstream school	Facebook, Snapchat, Instagram, and twitter
13	Joy	F	13	Amazing Grace	Faith school	Email, YouTube, Internet, and Snapchat
14	Jude	M	13	City of Favour	Faith school	Facebook, email, and YouTube
15	Justin	M	13	Amazing Grace	Faith school	TV, Phone, and Xbox 360
16	Lucy	F	13	City of favour	Faith school	Instagram, Twitter, Snapchat, Blog, and TV
17	Mary	M	13	City of Favour	Faith school	Instagram, WhatsApp, and Snapchat
18	Matthew	M	14	City of Favour	Mainstream School	Facebook, Twitter,

						Instagram, Game console, and Snapchat
19	Mercy	F	13	City of Favour	Mainstream school	WhatsApp, Instagram, and Snapchat
20	Moses	M	15	City of favour	Mainstream school	YouTube, the internet, TV, computer games, and Google mails
21	Natalia	F	15	King of Glory	Faith school	Snapchat, Instagram, Twitter, and Periscope
22	Oscar	M	13	Amazing Grace	Faith school	Phone, Internet, and Google play
23	Peace	M	13	City of Favour	Mainstream school	Instagram and Facebook
24	Precious	F	14	Green Pasture	Mainstream school	Instagram, WhatsApp, TV, and Laptop
25	Shimon	M	14	Amazing Grace	Faith school	WhatsApp, Skype, email, and YouTube
26	Victoria	F	14	Green pasture	Mainstream school	TV and Phone
27	Zoe	F	15	City of Favour	Faith school	Facebook, Instagram, and Snapchat